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LIFE OF THE BLESSED MASTER JOHN OF AVILA.

QUARTERLY SERIES. VOLUME NINETY-SEVEN.

ROEHAMPTON :

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BLESSED JOHN OF AVILA.

a.458

LIFE OF THE BLESSED MASTER JOHN OF AVILA

SECULAR PRIEST,

Called the Apostle of Andulusia.

BY

FATHER LONGARO DEGLI ODDI,

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

EDITED BY J. G. MACLEOD, S.J.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION.

The author, in compliance with the Decrees of Pope Urban VIII. and of the Holy Roman Inquisition, issued in the years 1625, 1631, and 1634, declares that the faith claimed for the matters related in this history, is that founded on mere human authority; he submits the whole to the judgment of the Apostolic See, of which he glories in being an obedient son and subject.

IGNATIUS VICECOMES,

PRÆPOSITUS GENERALIS SOCIETATIS JESU.

Cum librum, cui titulus: *Vita del Venerabil servo di Dio il Maestro Giovanni d'Avila sacerdote secolare* a P. Lòngaro degli Oddi Societatis nostræ Sacerdote conscriptum, aliquot ejusdem Societatis Theologi recognoverint, et in lucem edi posse probaverint; facultatem facimus ut typis mandetur, si iis ad quos pertinet, ita videbitur: cujus rei gratia has litteras manu nostra subscriptas, et sigillo nostro munitas dedimus. Romæ, 18 Martii, 1753.

Ignatius Vicecomes.

PREFACE.

BY THE ITALIAN EDITOR.

THE readers of this *Life of Blessed John of Avila* may well be surprised that one who even in his lifetime was celebrated for no ordinary sanctity, both in his own country and beyond it, should not have been beatified before an interval of three centuries and a half from the time of his death. And this all the more, because, as a spiritual director and guide, he had led so many along the paths of the highest perfection, of whom several have been venerated on our altars long before he was; we refer to St. John of God, St. Francis Borgia, St. Peter Alcantara, St. Teresa of Jesus. It is but recently that he who, for his skill in guiding souls, was honoured with the title of "the Master," has been promoted to only the initiatory step of beatification. One reason for this delay seems to be that in the case of a priest, who did not belong to any corporate body of the clergy, secular or regular, there have been none to undertake the important and laborious work of promoting his cause; the energies of those devoted to his memory, however learned and capable, being not sufficiently united to attain this end. But if we look higher,

we shall see that the Divine goodness, which by its hidden providence rules and governs the other events of this life, directs also for its own highest purposes the religious honours to be bestowed upon its servants. It sometimes happens that immediately after they have passed into the other world it brings them into prominence, either through the eagerness which it awakens amongst Christians to exalt them, or through the supernatural testimony of miracles. Or, again, it sometimes permits their memory to die out for a time, and even appears to have lost all interest in them, but only in order that it may manifest this again at the fitting time with all the greater effect, and may revive their memory by new portents, rousing men's minds from their lethargy, and urging them to promote by every means in their power the glory of His saints on earth.

God has been pleased to act in this second way with regard to His beloved servant, Blessed John of Avila. We rejoice that, in our days, the desire of so many holy souls has been granted; we rejoice that, amidst the moral and religious decay of Christian nations, another beatified Saint comes forward, along with so many others recently raised to our altars, to re-invigorate by his example the souls that have grown feeble. From out of the cloud which obscures the sound principles of eternal truth shines brightly this pure star in the spiritual heavens, a fresh gem added to the lustre that encircles the Roman Pontificate in this jubilee year of our Holy Father, Leo XIII.

This Life of John of Avila, which is now published on the happy occasion of his Beatification, was written during the last century by Father Lòngaro degli Oddi, of the Society of Jesus. It is one of the best which has appeared, and is composed in a simple style, well calculated to awaken admiration for the Servant of God and a desire to imitate his virtues. The Society of Jesus was, from its very beginning, especially dear to Blessed John of Avila, as will appear from the course of this narrative. He was bound to its holy founder by ties of veneration and sincerest friendship. To it he sent many of his best disciples, as he thought it his duty to make some return for the benefits received from St. Ignatius by spreading the fame of his Institute through Italy when the Cause of his Beatification came before the Sacred Congregation of Rites. In compiling his Life, the author made use of that written by the celebrated Father, Louis of Granada, of the holy Order of Preachers, an intimate friend of Blessed Avila, who wrote with the sole purpose of setting forth a perfect sample of what a sacred orator should be. Father Lòngaro degli Oddi also availed himself of the Life by the Licentiate, Louis Muñoz, which contains short sketches of Father Avila's principal disciples; and in the last place he made use of the Processes compiled in his times for the beatification of the Servant of God. We have only added a few short notes, and have given at the end an account of the three miracles which were carefully examined by the Sacred Congregation and solemnly approved

by our Holy Father Leo XIII., in the Decree of November 12, 1893.

The profit which will be derived by all classes of persons, ecclesiastics or laymen, from the study of this most edifying life, will gladden him who has been beatified as reigning in Heaven, while it will be, as it were, a continuation of his apostolate in the Church, and a renewal of that masterly spiritual teaching which was so pre-eminently his own whilst he dwelt on earth.

The main portion of a document treating of the *Conformity of Spirit between the Blessed John of Avila and St. Ignatius*, and contained amongst the *Cartas de San Ignacio*, has been appended by the English Editor; such portions only being omitted as were already incorporated in the Life itself.

Last of all will be found a *Letter of Advice* given by Father Avila to Father James de Guzman and Dr. Loarte, when they were about to enter the Society of Jesus.

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Book I.

CONTAINING THE ACCOUNT OF HIS BIRTH, STUDIES, AND APOSTOLICAL MINISTRY.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH, EDUCATION, AND EARLY STUDIES.

It is the usual habit of human depravity to endeavour to escape from the shame of its own wickedness by casting the blame upon the evil state of the times, as if holiness were not the ornament of every age, and the fruit of every season. Holiness did indeed flourish and make its beauty manifest in the early ages of the Church, when the Blood of the Divine Son, recently shed, still ran warm in its veins. However, as years went by, its vigour decreased more and more, so that, to require from a world grown old in vice, the fruits of evangelical perfection would be as vain as to seek for the blossoms of spring amidst the bitter cold of winter. Nevertheless, Divine Providence has raised up in every age, some grand souls of sterner quality, who, by the light of their exemplary life, showed that holiness does not depend upon the times, but is a product of grace, and that grace, when it finds in the soil of our hearts the requisite dispositions, plants, fosters, and brings to maturity habits of virtue which rise superior to all the inclinations of nature, and belong rather to Heaven than to earth. Such a soul was the Blessed John of Avila, whose Life we have undertaken to write, a great example and teacher of Christian perfection, an honour to the secular clergy, and a missionary who on account of his glorious labours for the conversion of his fellow-men, was called the Apostle of Andalusia.

He was a Spaniard, a native of Almodovar del Campo, in the kingdom of New Castile, and in the diocese of Toledo. His parents were Alfonso of Avila and Catherine Chicona, who both belonged to families of good position in the country, and were of untainted faith and well-known piety.

They had been married some years without having any children, when at last God was pleased to hear their prayers and grant their desires through the intercession of St. Bridget, to whom Catherine had specially commended herself in order to obtain this favour. For this intention, the pious lady had undertaken a devout pilgrimage of thirteen days, barefoot, and dressed in sackcloth, to a famous hermitage situated upon the summit of a high mountain not far from Almodovar, in which a miraculous picture of this Saint was venerated. Her hopes were not deceived, for in a few weeks Catherine found herself with child, and in due time gave birth to a son, the John of whom we are writing, an infant who, like Samuel, may truly be called the son of prayers and tears.

He was born on the 6th of January, the feast of the Epiphany, in the year 1500, during the Pontificate of Pope Alexander VI., Spain being governed by the Most Catholic King Ferdinand V., and Queen Isabella. It is said that during the whole time of her pregnancy Catherine could only take food once a day on Thursdays and Fridays—a circumstance which, though it might appear strange, was not considered significant until after the birth of John, when it was noticed that upon those two days he only took milk once, according to the same rule. This was afterwards considered prophetic of the tender devotion which he always manifested in an especial manner to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar and to the Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ, so that out of reverence to those two sublime mysteries, he

observed the same rigorous fast until the close of his life.

No sooner had reason dawned in John than he showed that he possessed the germs of every beautiful virtue; openness of heart, which manifested itself in his countenance, a tractable nature apt to receive every good impression, a virginal modesty, a loving submission to his elders, an unvarying gentleness and sweetness in dealing with all. His careful parents did not neglect to cultivate this promising soil, instilling into his mind at an early age the holy fear of God, and instructing him minutely in the obligations of a Christian life. And the pains they took grew delightful to them when they saw that their labour was rewarded, and that their teaching already bore fruit.

The things which have been related by persons deserving of credit, who were his contemporaries, concerning his early years, appear almost incredible. John had not completed his fifth year, when, even thus early visited by Divine grace *in benedictionibus dulcedinis*, he was often found by the servants in the dead of night either kneeling in prayer, trembling and benumbed with cold, or lying, worn out by his long vigils, asleep upon the ground. When he was later than usual in returning home from school he was always discovered in a corner of some church, holding sweet converse with his Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He was also in the habit of frequently retiring to some remote room in the house to torment his innocent body by taking the discipline. His mother having bought for him a new velvet suit handsomely trimmed, he could not bear to have to wear it, such was, even at that time, his hatred of self and of all worldly pomp, so that he never rested until, having met with some shabbily dressed child of his own age, he obliged him to exchange clothes. When asked by his mother what he

had done to make himself look like a little beggar-boy, he blushed and frankly confessed the truth, adding that the exchange had done justice to both of them.

Having obtained permission to partake for the first time of the Bread of Angels, he went to Holy Communion with a purity of heart and ardent charity which the most perfect might envy. We must not omit to notice here what we shall hereafter have to describe more fully, namely, that this was for him the first beginning of that sublime perfection to which he attained in his mature years, so that he was wont to say that to this, more than to any other mystery, he was indebted for whatever good there might be in his soul.

Childishness or frivolity he seems never to have known, and the maturity of age shone in every action. His whole delight was in intercourse with pious and spiritual persons, in visiting churches, listening to sermons, reading devotional books, and, the scholar becoming teacher, in imparting to other children what he had learned in catechisms and sermons. As hymns are always attractive to the young, he gathered together his companions, especially on festivals, to sing them in the public streets and squares. This was the only motive of sufficient force to draw him into companionship with others, for as to himself, he was both by nature and grace attracted to solitude, being fully convinced that innocence is a flower which if touched by any unwholesome breath may easily lose its freshness.

At the early age of fourteen, having already completed his course of Humanities and passed through the class of Rhetoric, the promise of rare ability he had displayed induced his father to send him to study law at Salamanca. Success in that profession, it was hoped, might lead to distinction, and help to advance the worldly position of his family. However, God, whose

secret counsels are often far different from ours, and who had nobler designs concerning John, made use of this separation from his father only to unite him more closely with Himself, and to render him a fit instrument for His glory. He had scarcely entered upon his new career when our Lord made His voice heard, illuminating his mind with vivid celestial light by which to recognize the worthlessness of all human things, and the happiness of serving God, our highest and unfailing good, who alone, when possessed and loved, suffices to satisfy the soul. By that light, which stirred the soul of the innocent youth like a trumpet-call, he felt his thoughts and affections suddenly changed, and there arose in his heart an ardent longing to lead a perfect life, and to seek nothing for himself but Jesus Christ.

In this frame of mind, having lost all relish for the world, he applied himself seriously to a closer union with God, to a stricter custody of the senses, and to a more rigorous self-denial, examining minutely the slightest movements of his heart and chastising it severely for every trifling deviation from the right path. From that time were remarked in him more recollection in prayer, greater assiduity in frequenting the sacraments, harsher treatment of his body, a more interior spirit, fewer words, more circumspection in his bearing, such, in fact, as to fill with holy envy souls already far advanced in the path of perfection.

Nevertheless, he continued his legal studies with all possible diligence, but as he afterwards admitted, simply out of obedience, and without any pleasure, for whatever the reason might be, he conceived an aversion for that kind of knowledge, and considered the time employed in acquiring it completely wasted. He continued this study until, having informed his father of his disinclination, he was allowed to abandon it, and recalled home to his native place.

Upon returning home, the first favour which John begged from his parents was, the use of a small room in a remote and unoccupied part of the house, where, far from all noise and interruption, he could apply himself quietly and undisturbed to the salvation of his soul and to perfecting himself in virtue. He led the life of a hermit in this chamber for nearly three years, never going out except when required to do so by necessity, duty, or devotion. His manner of life, in what was rather a garret than a room, is almost incredible. Complete abstraction from all things of sense, constant intercourse with God, perpetual silence, unbroken prayer, the poorest and scantiest food, and for a bed, a hard plank or a heap of brushwood, thrown down in a corner; frequent fasts and disciplines, rough sackcloth, things which, when reported among the neighbours, or often witnessed with their own eyes, excited in all a degree of wonder, and a depth of feeling which were powerful enough to rekindle in the whole of that district the almost extinct fervour of former days. Such force has example to bring about what, without it, would appear to be impossible.

It is easy to imagine how unwillingly his parents beheld this severe treatment of his body by their son, so dear to them on every account; yet they did not dare to interfere with him, being afraid of opposing the Divine will, and of hindering the sovereign operations of the Holy Spirit within him. It was therefore necessary for God Himself to draw him forth from this hiding-place, as it were from under a bushel, and place him upon a candlestick to shine as a burning light for the profit of His Church. This change in his life came to pass as follows.

CHAPTER II.

HIS STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY AT ALCALA. HE RECEIVES HOLY ORDERS. HIS CALL TO THE INDIES CHANGED BY GOD INTO THE WORK OF PREACHING IN ANDALUSIA.

Young John of Avila continued to live thus for nearly three years, remaining a solitary in the midst of the multitude, a hermit amongst his own relations, and leading, in his father's house, a life of rigid severity, with no other thought than that of sanctifying himself, and of making continual progress in the path of Christian perfection. At this juncture there happened to come to Almodovar a Religious of the Order of St. Francis, who had a great reputation for holiness. This Religious, hearing what was said throughout the district of the virtues of the holy youth, of his retirement, his penances, his continuous prayer, and his union with God, conceived a wish to make his acquaintance, and asked to speak with him. At the first interview he recognized in him a great soul, capable of performing the highest works for the glory of God. He was amazed at finding such maturity of mind and steadiness of resolution at so immature an age, and advised him not to allow the many talents bestowed upon him by God to remain hidden. He told him that he ought at once to resume his studies, devoting himself to the acquisition of holy and profitable kinds of knowledge, which would enable him to render greater

service to the Church, and to sanctify his own soul and the souls of others. He also spoke with his parents to the same effect. That this counsel was from God the event proved more fully than could at that time have been foreseen.

Convinced by the reasons adduced by this holy Religious, John, with his father's consent, speedily set out for Alcalà, in order to begin the study of philosophy and theology. He had the good fortune to have for his master, in both subjects, the celebrated Professor, Fra Dominic Soto, a great luminary of the famous Order of St. Dominic, and a noted teacher of that age. No sooner had that experienced master, a man of singular discernment, tested by a rigorous cross-examination the capacity and disposition of his new pupil, than, having found his intellect to be clear and methodical, quick in comprehending, subtle in objecting, and tenacious in retaining, he conceived such esteem of him, that he several times declared publicly that, were John to continue his studies, he would speedily become one of the most learned men in Spain: a prophecy which could be made with the greater security inasmuch as the assiduity and diligence of the pupil were all that could be desired.

No less was the reputation for holiness which John acquired, not only with his teacher, but also with the numerous students of that University, just as had happened a few years previously at Salamanca. His avoidance of all amusements, his entire absorption either in his studies or in works of piety, his constant attendance in the church and in the schools, his calm and reserved bearing, his pure and guileless manners, his freedom from conceit, and his humble and respectful conduct attracted the attention of all, and made all regard him with a certain respect, not to say veneration, so that every one was anxious to have intercourse with

him and to gain his friendship. He, having perceived this, was not deceived by the flattering breath of vainglory: he became ever more and more distrustful of self, redoubling his watchfulness in proportion as the dangers were greater and more frequent in the midst of this crowd of young men. Far from abandoning any of his pious practices, he applied himself to perform them more faithfully, and, inasmuch as his studies might be regarded, both as to their subject, and as to the holy end to which they were directed, as something sacred, he availed himself of them to increase the fervour of his devotion, as he made use of devotion to give himself more earnestly to study.

It was at Alcalà that he contracted an intimate spiritual friendship with Don Pedro Guerrero, who afterwards became Archbishop of Granada; at that time his fellow-student, a man famous for holiness and learning. This friendship, being founded on similarity in virtue, was never interrupted, but went on increasing, so that, throughout life, Avila had no one who by influence and authority aided him more than Guerrero in performing his great works for God, nor had Guerrero anything which he valued more than the prayer and advice of Father Avila, to help him in the good government of the Church committed to his care.

John had not yet completed his course of philosophy, when it pleased God to call to Himself both his parents; which loss, though deeply felt, he turned to his great profit, using it to bind himself more closely to God, in proportion as he became less attached to creatures. He nevertheless continued his studies until he had finished the course of scholastic theology, leaving behind him a reputation as a brilliant genius and as one of the most amiable and tractable students who

had ever frequented that University. His memory was long cherished there, and he served as a model to those who came after, both for his conduct and for progress in all piety and learning.

Having terminated his course of study in the most necessary branches of knowledge, he resolved to take Holy Orders. He had felt, almost from infancy, a special attraction towards the priesthood, so that while still a child, it was his great pleasure to be present in church at ecclesiastical functions, and afterwards to imitate them at home before a little altar of his own. Now that he had attained to an age and a position in which he was able to carry his wish into effect, he did not hesitate a moment. Nevertheless, having formed a high idea of the priestly dignity, and of the holiness which befits such an office, he wished to make a long and careful preparation for it. Having put aside all other thoughts and occupations, he applied himself for several days, by means of holy meditations and fervent acts of every virtue, to the purification of his heart from all earthly affections, plunging deeper into the consciousness of his own nothingness, and of the solemn obligations which the priestly character entails, he who receives it becoming, by this ministry, a mediator between God and man. For this end, he redoubled his fasts, multiplied his disciplines, prolonged his vigils, and dressed himself in the roughest sackcloth, until, having shaken off all dust of earth, and richly adorned his soul with the virtues appertaining to the great act which he was about to perform, he received Holy Orders from the hands of the Bishop. It is difficult to say whether he was more confused at the high honour to which he found himself raised, or more pleased at seeing himself so closely united with God by means of that new tie.

After being ordained priest, he returned to his

native place, in order to say his first Mass in the church where his parents were interred. The tender devotion with which he offered the Holy Sacrifice for the first time may be inferred from what has just been said, and from what he did upon the day of those first espousals. It was an ancient custom in that part of the country for every newly-ordained priest upon this solemn occasion to entertain all his relatives and friends at a sumptuous banquet. John, rather than conform to such a usage, which often degenerated into license, brought to his house instead twelve poor people, washed their feet, dressed them all at his own expense, feasted them handsomely, serving them himself at table, and caressing them in every way, to the wonder and admiration of all beholders, who were moved to tears of tenderness and devotion.

But, in proportion as this new dignity raised him above himself, so much the more did he feel it incumbent upon him to seek perfection, by entering from that moment upon a new and more holy life. It will suffice to say here, that all that he had conceived as to the grandeur and sublimity of virtue and perfection befitting the priestly office, was exemplified in his own life and habits, so that he became, in all his actions, a model for priests. The signal service which he was afterwards able to perform for the salvation of souls was in great part owing to this. It would be difficult to tell how many of the clergy in various cities and districts guided themselves by his example, either in their preparation for the priesthood, or, if already priests, in adopting a mode of life which was conformable to their holy state, being persuaded that they could not regulate their conduct better than by following in his footsteps.

However, the time had now arrived when, beside the work of sanctifying himself daily more and more, he

was to take upon him the labour of benefiting others, and of employing himself for the glory of God in the salvation of souls. With this intent, various plans occurred to his mind, but the one which pleased him best was the idea of starting for America, to carry the light of the Gospel to the barbarous nations of those regions. This design was well suited to his humility and zeal, seeing that it was little likely to lead to earthly honours, and was rich in its promise of sufferings and crosses. Moreover, he might also attain thereby his ardent desire, which was to give his life for Jesus Christ, and to die a martyr for the faith. Having formed this resolution, after much prayer he suddenly decided, in order that there should be no drawing back from it, to sell his whole patrimony in accordance with the example of the Apostles and the counsel of Christ, and to distribute the money to the poor, retaining only for himself a single suit of rough cloth, in which he might appear decently dressed. Having thus freed himself from all worldly impediments, he presented himself, upon the first opportunity, before the new Bishop of Tlascala, who was about to start for Mexico, and offered to accompany him. He was accepted without a moment's hesitation, and, in 1527, set out for Seville, in order to be ready to embark immediately, when the opportunity offered for such a voyage.

In Seville John took up his abode in a small house, in company with another good priest, being unwilling to have any one to wait upon him, but desiring to live in all things by the rule of evangelical poverty. For food he contented himself with herbs, fruit, and a little milk, all of which needed no fire for their preparation, and these he bought with the scanty alms received from a few devout persons who dwelt in the neighbourhood. He spent a great part of the day, and also of the night, in

prayer, torturing his body with harsh penances, visiting the sick of the parish, serving in the public hospital, comforting all with his devout discourse, and inflaming them with the holy love of God.

He said Mass every morning in a neighbouring church, to which a holy priest, Ferdinand Contreras, also repaired daily for the same purpose. The latter was a man of more than fifty years of age, of rare virtue, greatly enlightened by God, and held in high esteem throughout the city. Having seen John several times, and having observed his long preparation for the Holy Sacrifice, and the decorum, recollection, and devotion with which he offered it at the altar, shedding abundant tears; also his long thanksgiving afterwards, always made upon his knees; this priest conceived a great esteem for him, and desired to win his friendship. Having talked with him, visited him in his house, and held spiritual converse with him on several occasions, he found him to be such as he had imagined, a man of deep virtue and learning, greatly illuminated by God, and already far advanced in the path of Christian perfection. Upon hearing the reason which had brought him there, and his determination to proceed to the Indies to spend his life for the salvation of souls in those regions, Contreras, enlightened, we must believe, by some heavenly inspiration, set to work to dissuade him from so doing, representing to him the greater service which he might render to the Divine Majesty by abandoning his project, and employing himself wholly in the sanctification of Spain, which was then in the greatest need of such an apostolate. Notwithstanding his efforts, Ferdinand could not succeed, because Avila, alleging the engagement which he had entered into with the Bishop of Tlascala, refused to break his promise, and change the plan already decided upon. However, Contreras was not discouraged, and being more than

ever desirous to retain such a treasure for Spain, he had recourse to Don Alfonso Manrique, Archbishop of Seville, Inquisitor General of the whole kingdom, and shortly after raised to the purple by Pope Clement VII., informing him of the rich prize which he had found in Avila, and of the great blessings which the diocese and the whole kingdom might receive through his apostolical labours. This was enough to determine that zealous prelate not to allow John to slip from his hands, and he decided, if the expression of his wishes in the matter failed to change his resolution, to employ the full weight of his authority. He summoned him to his presence at the beginning of the year 1528, receiving him most kindly, and showing him every attention. Having satisfied himself as to his piety and learning, his charity and zeal, and the holy desire with which God in His infinite mercy had inspired him, to employ himself wholly in His service and for the benefit of souls, he offered him his large diocese as a field for his labours, a field in which opportunities would not be wanting for him to realize all his ardent longing after a life of toil and suffering. He urged that charity begins at home, and assured him that the Indies would have sufficient labourers to satisfy their needs. He would have said still more, had not Avila continued to plead his previous engagement with the Bishop of Tlascala, Fra Giuliano Gorges, and his grateful determination not to forsake one who had so lovingly accepted him as his companion. The Archbishop therefore assumed an air in which kindness was blended with the firm tone of command, saying, "Well, since my reasons do not persuade you, my authority shall suffice: listen to me; I order you, in virtue of holy obedience, to remain with me. God would have you stay here." At these positive and resolute words, spoken by one so deserving, on every account,

of the deepest respect, the objections died upon the young priest's lips; he bowed his head and re lied, "My lord, since this is the Divine will for me, may it be fulfilled. I am content." The Archbishop lost no time in giving to his flock the benefit of the great treasure which he had secured for it. But of this we must speak in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

HE BEGINS TO PREACH IN SEVILLE, HIS NATURAL GIFTS FOR THAT HOLY MINISTRY, AND HIS DILIGENCE IN CULTIVATING THEM.

MANRIQUE, greatly delighted at the recruit which he had thus gained for his diocese, desired him to preach before him in the Collegiate Church of S. Salvador, July 22nd, 1529, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, and all John's humility was unable to find means of escaping from that honourable charge.

No sooner was this bruited abroad in Seville, than, attracted by the fame of his sanctity, all flocked to hear him. The church was already filled with a crowd of all classes, and he was about to ascend the pulpit when, seized with sudden shame and fear, he broke down in a violent fit of weeping, and was on the very point of running away altogether. It was only a delusion of the devil, who had now begun to be apprehensive of the serious wounds which that tongue, keener than any two-edged sword, would one day inflict upon him. Nevertheless the evil one was not victorious, for whilst the holy man was thus deeply agitated and perplexed, he chanced to cast his eyes upon a crucifix which hung from one of the walls. For a moment he remained immovable, gazing fixedly upon the image of his Saviour, when drawing a deep sigh he cried out, while the tears streamed down his face: "My God, if it be Thy will that I should preach, remove from me this

great confusion which I feel; do this, I beseech Thee, by that greater confusion which Thou didst experience in Thy bitter Passion; Thou knowest whether I seek aught else but Thy glory and the salvation of souls."

At this God took pity upon him; his fears vanished in an instant, and he felt himself strengthened with power from on high. He immediately mounted the pulpit, and preached for two hours with such zeal, that the whole of that numerous audience was filled with holy terror and salutary fear. After the sermon, many hastened to be reconciled with God in the tribunal of Penance, so that, as some declared, more good could not have been hoped for from a whole mission.

Many priests and clerics were so deeply moved, that they firmly resolved to amend their lives, and to apply themselves earnestly to the acquisition of Christian perfection. For this purpose they entered into a close spiritual friendship with the servant of God, and became his scholars, that he might do with them whatever would contribute most to the glory of God and the salvation of their souls.

However, it was not this one sermon only which was so wonderful in its results. It may be truly affirmed, as we shall see hereafter, that every sermon he preached was fruitful for the salvation of many souls. So much was this the case, that a very learned man of that time used to say, that a sermon of Father Avila's resembled one of the nets with which fishermen gather in fish of all kinds, and always in abundance: and that master of Christian eloquence, Father Luis of Granada, likened him to an arquebuse loaded to the muzzle, which made great havoc at one discharge.

And here we may say something of his manner of preaching, and of the brilliant gifts with which God had endowed him, for the fruitful exercise of this apostolical ministry. Father Avila was always con-

spicuous for a natural and popular eloquence which was clear and understood by all. It was enhanced by a wonderful skill in exposition which insinuating itself into the minds of his hearers, charmed and captivated them without their being aware of it; by powerful and conclusive argumentation, which convinced even the most intractable intellect; and by an utterance which was at times so vehement when fulminating against vice, that, says Father Luis of Granada, the whole church seemed to tremble. It is related, that when he one day took the place of a noted preacher whose audience were in the habit upon leaving the church, of breaking out into the praises of their favourite, and of commending loudly one or other of the brilliant thoughts which he had so gracefully expressed, the same congregation left Father Avila's sermon in silence, with heads bent, compunction in their hearts, and tears in their eyes. It was indeed the common opinion in his day, that Father Avila had no equal in the pulpit. So said Father Augustine Saluzio, of the Order of Preachers, a holy man and profound theologian, who declared that for several centuries no orator had been heard in Spain so truly apostolical as Father Avila, and that he had been sent by God for the reformation of morals, and for the sanctification of all that country.

He did not neglect to cultivate his natural talents. Though possessed of an intelligence both acute and profound, though learned in theology, in which he had already taken his master's degree, and equipped with a rich store of science and sacred erudition, no sooner did he become engaged, out of obedience, in the arduous occupation of preaching, than he sought a guide in whose steps he might walk securely without fear of stumbling. Such he found in the great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, and he immediately set to work to try to copy in himself his gifts and virtues, beginning

a diligent and attentive study of his Epistles, endeavouring to penetrate their deeper meaning, to unravel the most intricate knots, to dissect the finest and most subtle fibres of thought, all which he did so thoroughly that the very words remained impressed upon his memory, and he could quote them freely at will.

Indeed we may say that the holy Apostle having thus become his teacher, unfolded to him the most hidden mysteries contained therein, so happily did the Servant of God explain them and weave them into his sermons. From these writings, more than from any others, he learnt the soundness in argument, sublimity of doctrine, the force of reasoning, and whatever else of grandeur shone in his discourses, and is still admired in his works. We must not omit to notice the effect upon a distinguished theologian, also a Dominican, who, upon hearing him expound from the pulpit one of the most abstruse passages in those Epistles, said, filled with wonder: "This morning I have heard St. Paul explain St. Paul."

Yet, his pre-eminence as a preacher was not so much due to natural talent, nor even to art acquired by long study. It was a product of that intense charity towards God which filled him and animated him with the most burning desire to increase His glory, and to see Him faithfully served by men. Whenever he was about to preach, he wrote down brief notes of the topics he intended to touch upon, together with such arguments drawn from Scripture or from the Fathers, as he thought were to the point. Before ascending the pulpit he spent at least two hours on his knees before a crucifix, and not unfrequently the whole night, "bargaining" with God for the souls of those he sought to save, persisting in prayer, until the sound of the bell warned him that the hour for preaching had come, when, like another Moses, his heart and coun-

tenance inflamed *ex consortio sermonis Domini*, he went to deliver to his hearers the message of his Heavenly Master.

He spoke with such ardour and profundity, that Doctor Francis de Terones, preacher to the King, a celebrated man, and afterwards Bishop of Leon, has said of him in one of his printed treatises upon the art of preaching: "We knew in our own time, Father John of Avila, who, in preaching, sent fire into the hearts of all who listened;" and that this was the literal truth, and not merely the exaggeration of one prejudiced in his favour, was proved by God, by means of extraordinary signs and wonders. Many affirmed that, whilst the Servant of God was preaching, they had seen sparks of fire issue from his mouth, and strike one or other of his hearers, and it was noticed that those who had been thus touched changed their habits from that time forth, and led better lives. Amongst the rest was a certain Doña Sancia Carrillo, a lady of noble birth, who being then in the bloom of her youth, made a great sensation in the world by her beauty and accomplishments, and who, after falling into the hands of Father Avila, was gained by him for God, and attained to a high degree of sanctity, as we shall hereafter relate.

This same Doña Sancia Carrillo, having become the spiritual child of the holy master, and being already far advanced on the road of evangelical perfection, was permitted by God to behold over his head while preaching, a flame of marvellous brilliancy, and to see proceeding from his mouth bright rays of light, which reached to the ears of the hearers: clear tokens of that celestial fire which burned in his breast and moved him to speak.

Before concluding this chapter I will mention some salutary instructions given by this apostolical man and Christian orator, to those who consulted him on this

subject; instructions worthy in themselves of being recorded, and which, while intended to form a rough outline for the guidance of others, serve admirably to paint the portrait of the orator himself. Having been asked by a young preacher for some suggestions as to the best way of exercising that holy ministry with profit, "What can I say to you," he replied, "except tell you to love our Lord deeply? Love Him with all your heart, and experience will teach you how from such love proceeds an ardent thirst for His glory; and since God is never more highly glorified than by the holiness of His creatures, there is kindled in the heart at the same time, an insatiable zeal to sanctify souls, for the sake of which one would gladly face martyrdom. 'Lovest thou Me? . . . feed My sheep,' are our Lord's own words."

To another he writes thus, on the same subject: "Would you labour fruitfully for the conversion of sinners? Excite first in yourself a deep sorrow for their sins. Oh! how few are the mothers who, like the widow of Nain, weep over the death of their children! That is the reason why they are not sufficiently anxious to have them restored to life." Exhorting another to cultivate a great hunger for the salvation of souls, if he desired to win many, he declared that this hunger would nerve him to unceasing exertions, and supply the fittest weapons for piercing hearts. He adds that he ought to be like the falcon when it is taken out for a hunting party; for the more famished it is, the more abundant is the prey which it finds and strikes down.

John of Avila was in Montilla with the Marquis of Priego, when there came to preach in the city, Father Luis of Granada, then in his early youth, an orator who like a young plant showed in his sermons at that time much more of flower than of fruit. The Servant of God went several times to hear him with a sort of compas-

sion; understanding fully the powerful genius of Granada, and the signal service which he might render to the Church by his talents, if he were to enter upon the true path, and treat of the things of God in earnest. However, as such censorship was no business of his, he prudently forbore to speak; but having been asked afterwards by Count Pedro de Feria, in the presence of Granada, what he thought of his preaching, he said: "To say the truth, I have no great taste for sermons which do not treat simply of Jesus Christ Crucified." This gentle warning was not lost upon him for whom it was intended, and Granada, deeply humble as he was, hastened to confer with Father Avila, and to become his pupil, entreating him to instruct him in the manner to be pursued in preaching, and promising not to swerve in the very least from his advice. This the Servant of God undertook most willingly, furnishing him with valuable suggestions, by the good use of which Granada changed his manner from that time, with the great fruit which is known to all, this happy result being principally due to the advice of Father Avila.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY RESULTS OF HIS PREACHING IN SEVILLE, AND IN OTHER PARTS OF ANDALUSIA. HE IS DENOUNCED TO THE HOLY INQUISITION, AND DECLARED INNOCENT.

The Archbishop of Seville, having heard the new preacher, and seen the great fruit produced by a single sermon, rejoiced greatly, thanking the goodness of God for having sent as a companion in his pastoral solicitudes, not so much a man of this earth as an angel of Heaven. He summoned him to his presence, and embraced him affectionately, saying, "Dear Father Avila, your preaching has had this happy result—I am more than ever convinced that it is in this land, and not in the Indies, that God would have you labour. It can be clearly seen that He wants you to stay here. Go on bravely with the great work which you have begun. From henceforth I place my authority in your hands, and am ready to assist you myself, and with all that is mine."

These kind expressions of the Archbishop were a fresh incitement to one who already stood less in need of the spur than of the bridle. Therefore, setting aside all other thoughts, and having taken counsel with competent persons, concerning the vices which prevailed in that district, he began to combat them energetically in his sermons. He preached in church on Sundays and festivals, and the concourse was so great

that none of the churches being large enough to contain the crowd, it was necessary to open all the doors that those who remained outside might hear. The church was filled several hours before the time fixed for the sermon, and though it always lasted at least two hours, and the greater part of his hearers were obliged to stand, jostled by the immense crowd, they considered the discomfort more than repaid by the profit which they all derived from hearing him.

The benefit to their souls was indeed great; the very sight of him in the pulpit seemed to breathe holiness. The knowledge of the penitential life which he led, practising first himself what he prescribed to others; his bitter and continuous weeping over the wrongs which he saw done by Christians to the Divine Majesty; the burning desire which manifested itself in his countenance to save all, and to sanctify all; his loving calls to sinners to throw themselves into the arms of the Divine Mercy, and to return to the bosom of their good God; all these things roused compunction in the hardest hearts, and kindled the desire for a holier life. Whatever the vice might be against which he declaimed, his words pierced the hearts of his hearers, so that frequently the sermon was interrupted by the sobs of the audience, or by their cries for mercy and forgiveness, and it often happened that the preacher was obliged to pause in order that the people might give free vent to their contrition.

But, since the preacher does no more than plant the seed of the Divine Word in the soul of the hearer, or at best foster it for a while with the heat of his zeal, in order that it may take good root, while it belongs to another province of the ministry to gather in the grain white for the harvest, it was the invariable custom of Father Avila, at the close of each sermon, to invite the audience to be reconciled to God in the Sacrament of

Penance, and to announce that whoever wished might have access to him in that sacred tribunal. Accordingly, after descending from the pulpit, he went straight to the confessional, and remained there several hours, until he had attended to the needs and requirements of all. By this means more than any other, he rescued a large number of sinners from the mire of sin, and led many souls to high perfection, having for this work of direction a particular talent, besides the special assistance of Almighty God.

Yet all this, however great, was not sufficient fuel for the burning love of God and of his neighbour with which he was consumed. His charity and zeal must seek elsewhere more abundant materials with which to satisfy his insatiable avidity, and he found them. On week-days, after spending a considerable part of the night as well as of the day in prayer, in offering the Holy Sacrifice, and in reciting the Canonical Hours, he employed the remainder of his time in serving his neighbour, visiting those confined in the prisons, tending the sick in hospitals and private houses, ministering consolation to souls, and providing for their bodies by means of the charitable resources placed in his hands by the generosity of some wealthy friends. He also gave long audiences to the large number of persons who came to consult him about what concerned their salvation. Besides this he often found time to make up quarrels, to remove abuses, and to hinder public scandals.

His chief care was, always and above all, the sanctification of the clergy, that being the chosen portion of the flock of Jesus Christ, and they, being raised by their office above the rest, having the stricter obligation to set a good example. For this purpose, he frequently assembled the canons, parish priests, priests, and clerics, in the palace of the Archbishop, and discoursed to them

upon subjects suited to their vocation and circumstances, and so great was the fruit which resulted from these labours, and the sensible reform of manners, that in a short time the aspect of the city was completely changed.

Such were the first-fruits of his apostolate, and though there does not remain any particular and precise record of the many conversions which he effected, nor of his apostolical excursions into neighbouring cities and districts during the nine consecutive years which he spent in sanctifying that province, yet we know in general that the conversions were numerous and remarkable, and the journeys frequent, and always with the same good result, a large ingathering of souls.

However, it was not likely that the devil would long peacefully submit to these many signal defeats without revenging himself. Before long the evil one, who could not endure to see his prey snatched day after day from his grasp, found means to set in motion against the holy man the tongues of certain reprobates like so many sharp-edged swords to attack and overthrow him. These men, smarting under the denunciations of vice in some of his sermons, conceived the idea that his words were aimed at them in particular, in order to mortify them and put them to open shame. They therefore, in concert, denounced him to the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition, as a man of unsound doctrine, alleging principally that he closed the doors of Heaven against the rich. Having been summoned to give an account of himself, he was detained in custody until the formal indictment could be drawn up and the cause examined.

This heavy blow, which was all the more keenly felt because he knew it to be undeserved, might have utterly prostrated a man of less virtue than Father Avila. The restraint, the discomfort, the solitude of prison life, above all, the wound to his honour, attacked

in that most delicate matter, purity of doctrine, together with the thought of what the world would say, all this was most grievous and repugnant to nature. Nevertheless the calmness, patience, and gentleness which he displayed were almost incredible, and he adored in humble submission the dispositions of Divine Providence concerning him.

Having been advised by certain wise and prudent persons to justify himself and give his reasons, he could never be induced to do so, but always replied, that *his innocence was known to God, and that this sufficed.* When he heard them say afterwards that his cause rested solely in God's hands, meaning to intimate to him the serious danger in which he stood, he answered: "If this be the case, my cause has never been in so good a state as at present. Hitherto, men have acted, it is now God's turn, and He will not forsake those who trust in Him."

His hopes were not deceived. The judges were indeed on the point of pronouncing sentence of condemnation against the holy man, the accusation having gained strength from his silence, which was regarded as a tacit admission of guilt; but God, who brings light even out of darkness, and who causes the oppression of those dear to Him to tend to their greater exaltation, after having purified the soul of His servant for some months in the crucible of affliction, would no longer suffer such virtue to remain under the imputation of evil. His acquittal came to pass in this wise: having been asked whether he was conscious of having any enemy, he replied, that he was not conscious of having ever given cause of offence to any, but that perhaps some might have been angered by his sermons, and imagine that they had reason to suspect him; and he named them, the names given being precisely those of the accusers who had brought this sinister charge

against him. With this clue and by means of other indications which seemed to be made known miraculously, the iniquitous plot was discovered, and the truth brought to light, so that he was declared innocent, and on June 5, 1533, was once more set at liberty.

There are accusations which, as a well-known Italian proverb says, leave a bruise behind them even if they break no bones; in order, therefore, that his innocence might be clear to all, and that there might not rest upon him a shadow of suspicion in the future, besides the public declarations which were juridically made, the Holy Tribunal decided that Father Avila should resume his course of sermons upon the next feast-day which occurred, in the Church of S. Salvador in Seville, and return to the exercise of his apostolical ministry as before. Upon the appearance of the holy man in the pulpit, he was received with acclamations by the large audience, and by a flourish of trumpets from a band stationed by the magistrates in the square in front of the church, all giving expression to the common joy at the victory which he had gained over his enemies. At this mark of esteem and affection the modest servant of God blushed deeply. "It were better," he said, "both for you and for me to implore the Divine Majesty that we may obtain grace to repent of our sins and to secure our eternal salvation." He afterwards frankly admitted that this popular demonstration formed to his thinking a more dangerous temptation than anything which he had hitherto experienced.

To complete this account, we must not omit to mention what Father Avila repeatedly stated as having occurred to him during his brief imprisonment, namely, that the Divine light which flooded his soul in the darkness of his prison, was so vivid, enabling him to recognize more and more the greatness of God, the immense riches which we have in Jesus Christ, the

stringent motives which bind us to love Him, and trust Him, and suffer willingly for His sake; that, he learnt more in those few weeks of trial, than in all the prosperous years of his life. It being God's ordinary practice with souls whom He specially cherishes to make His presence felt beside them, precisely when, to human eyes, He seems to be furthest away and to have forgotten them completely.

There is a Brief of Pope Benedict XIV. dated April 3, 1742, referring to the above events, of which an outline may here be given, since it tends greatly to the honour of the holy priest whose life we are writing. It having been asked in the Sacred Congregation of Rites whether the cause of the beatification and canonization of the Venerable Master John of Avila might be introduced, an objection was raised on the ground of the accusation which had been made against him in Spain before the tribunal of the Inquisition. This having been brought forward, although his acquittal by that tribunal, and the juridical declaration of his innocence were also known, as we have just related it, nevertheless, the gravity of the matter induced the Holy Pontiff to inquire into it himself, and to insist upon a fresh examination of the pleadings both for and against the accused, as they had been officially drawn up upon the occasion in question. This having been done fully and with due deliberation, Benedict XIV. declared the Servant of God to have been acquitted by that sacred tribunal, not in an informal way, but to have been pronounced innocent without a single dissentient voice, by a definitive sentence, bearing date, June 5, 1533. "In such a manner," added the learned Pontiff, "that, far from the virtue of the holy man remaining in any way clouded, it, on the contrary, shone forth brighter and more beautiful." Therefore, his Brief concludes with these formal expressions of

commendation: "In fine the renown of his sanctity and the whole tenor of his life were so creditable that he stood forward as an example to others in the pursuit of perfection, and it was believed even then that he would some day be saluted as a great saint in Heaven, seeing that he already knew how 'to do' as well as how 'to teach.'"[1]

[1] "Fama denique sanctitatis (of the Servant of God) vitæque tenor adeo exemplaris, ut aliis exemplo ad virtutem præluceret, ac magnus olim in cœlo vocandus am tum crederetur, quippe, qui faceret simul et doceret."

CHAPTER V.

HE SANCTIFIES THE CITY OF CORDOVA BY HIS PREACHING. PROVISION MADE BY HIS ACTION AND ADVICE FOR THE RESTORATION OF PIETY AND GOOD MORALS.

The fame of the singular holiness of Father Avila having been bruited abroad, together with the news of the great works which he had performed for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, many cities and districts desired to hear him, and the Bishops were most urgent in their invitations to him to come and sanctify their dioceses by his zeal. Among the first to obtain this coveted favour was the noble city of Cordova, thanks to the earnest and repeated requests made to him by Fra John of Toledo, a prelate of great piety and learning, who at that time was Bishop of the see.

Truly the need could hardly have been greater, so complete was the corruption of morals amongst all classes. The young grew up ignorant and vicious; the nobility were given over to luxury; the populace thought of nothing but dissipation and gambling; the very clergy, who were bound to set an example of pure living, gloried in their misconduct, so that the vices of the ecclesiastics were the boldest and most shameless.

Such was the deplorable state of the city when the Servant of God entered it. He refused the comfortable

lodging provided for him by the Bishop in his own palace, and took up his abode in the public hospital of St. Bartholomew, where it seemed that God, to repay him quickly and with interest for this act of humility, wished to lodge him closer to Himself, for the room assigned to him there adjoined the church, and had a window opening into it, so that without leaving his retreat he could pray before the Blessed Sacrament at will and unnoticed, thus giving free scope to his tender devotion for that ineffable Mystery.

Having recognized the evil state of the city, the holy man clearly understood the arduous nature of the task before him. He therefore prepared himself for it by long prayers and severe penances, entreating the Father of Mercies to bestow upon him light and strength for the undertaking, and his request was granted. No sooner was his voice heard from the pulpit than the whole city was stirred. Inspired with grace from on high, he inveighed against the foulness of sin, and denounced it most vehemently, especially the public scandals, threatening those who refused to amend with the Divine vengeance, and picturing the terrors of the last tremendous Judgment, and the intensity of the pains reserved for sinners, so powerfully that all were terrified. The gambling-houses were quickly closed, the resorts of vice were forsaken, evil communications broken off, the bitterest quarrels made up, and scandals removed; in a short time Cordova resembled a repentant Ninive. Almost all were desirous, under the direction of the holy man, to become reconciled with God for the past, and to re-model their life for the future. He was unwearied in this great work, and insatiable in his desire to help every one, dividing his time between the confessional and the pulpit, giving himself to each and to all, to the unspeakable satisfaction of John of Toledo,

and of his successor, Don Cristobal de Rojas, also a prelate of great zeal and virtue.

Yet all this did not suffice to satisfy the great heart of this man of God. The labours mentioned above would have been enough to overtax the most robust constitution, but to them was added another very burdensome task, namely, that of returning every evening towards sunset to the pulpit to deliver a discourse[1] upon Holy Scripture, setting forth clearly, and with masterly insight, the deepest and most abstruse teaching of the Apostle St. Paul. The novelty of this subject excited more than any other the curiosity of the citizens, especially of ecclesiastics and men of rank, and rendered it very fruitful in results and most efficacious in winning souls.

Among these converts was one whose story is well known, Doña Leonora de Cordova, a lady of noble birth, who at the age of twenty-four was promised in marriage to a young Spanish grandee, her equal in position, and worthy of her by his excellent qualities. Having heard Father Avila develop in one of these discourses St. Paul's encomium on virginity, explaining how dear it is to God, how it makes men similar to angels, and the like, she was so deeply impressed that she changed her resolution from that time and would hear no more of earthly marriage.

In consequence of this determination, she sought an interview as soon as possible with the holy preacher, and opened her heart to him, disclosing the design which she had formed, asking advice and help from him to carry it out, and declaring that henceforth she placed her soul entirely in his hands. It does not belong

[1] These sermons are known as *lezioni* in Italy, and are distinct in style from the *prediche*, or morning sermons, but the idea which they represent would not be conveyed to English minds by either the word *lectures* or *readings*.

to us to relate here the wonderful progress which this generous disciple made in the way of Christian perfection under the guidance of so wise and experienced a master. She lived in the state of virginity to the age of eighty years, ever leading a life more angelical than human, constant in her endurance of the trial which God sent her of long and terrible maladies, and often supernaturally consoled in them. Finally, filled with merits and virtues, she crowned her innocent life with a still more precious death, as her biography, which has been published, amply testifies.

Moreover, the Servant of God did not neglect to enable those nearest him, namely, the sick in the hospital where he dwelt, to feel the ardour of his charity and zeal. Whatever time he could spare from the duties of the day, as well as a considerable part of the night, was employed in their service. There was no service too low and mean for him to render them. He swept the hospital, scoured the kitchen utensils, made the beds, nursed, washed, and fed the sick people, in short, he attended to everything. Above all, having won their love by caresses and presents, he prepared them for the sacraments, heard their confessions, encouraged them to suffer willingly for the sake of Jesus Christ, and gain merit from their crosses by Christian resignation, and when any were dying he never lost sight of them until he had, as it were, landed them safely in Paradise.

It was by no means the aim of this holy priest to produce in souls a mere temporary ebullition of fervour. This not unfrequently, like a rushing torrent, causes much noise and disturbance, but soon subsides and leaves no trace of itself. He wished to introduce a calmer but more durable piety, a natural spring which wells up peacefully in the heart but which never fails or runs dry. To secure this it was necessary to make

timely provision for training the young from their earliest years.

In the whole of Andalusia, and especially at Cordova, there was at that time a great scarcity of masters capable to teach the arts and sciences. It necessarily followed that most of the young men, even though gifted with considerable ability, yet not possessing sufficient means to support themselves during a course of study elsewhere, spent their days in idleness, and plunged headlong into the vices which it brings in its train, to the notable detriment both of their own souls and of the public welfare.

In order to afford a prompt remedy for a disorder of such moment, Father Avila laboured earnestly, both with the Bishop and also with the magistrates, until in the end he obtained for Cordova the opening of public schools for instruction in philosophy and theology, taking upon himself the burden of their support, and also of supplying them with suitable masters. The schools thus established were quickly filled with a number of pupils, and the city soon felt the benefit of them, as the holy man had expected. Things continued upon this footing until the Society of Jesus having been introduced into Cordova by the advice and through the action of Father Avila, the Fathers undertook the charge both of teaching the higher branches of learning just named, and of furnishing a good general education for the young.

The Servant of God showed the same, or even greater, care for the amendment of the clergy belonging to that diocese, for which purpose he took advantage of the diocesan synod held there by the new Bishop. He preached several times before it, reminding the priests of the high prerogatives appertaining to their office, the holiness of the character impressed upon their souls, and the strict obligations which it entails to

lead a pure life, and to set others an example of every virtue. It is said that it was upon this occasion that he first delivered his wonderful sermons upon the priesthood.

The compunction and fervour which his forcible language awakened in the hearts of all were manifested by their tears and by their subsequent amendment of life. By the advice, and under the direction of Blessed John, good provision was made for the future, and means were taken to restore a high tone of spirituality among the clergy, to bring back the old splendour to the Divine worship, to revive the exact observance of the sacred canons, in a word, to do all which might tend to the good guidance of ecclesiastics, and principally to the formation of pious and learned parish priests, such as it befits the pastors of the sheep of Jesus Christ to be.

When the clergy dispersed and appeared again amongst their people at the close of the synod, they were completely changed. The parish priests occupied themselves in preaching, in instructing their flock, in catechizing children, visiting the sick, assisting the dying, and in fulfilling, as far as they were able, the obligations of their ministry. Many priests, not content with adopting a more severe kind of life, renounced their property, and employed themselves, some in one manner and some in another, in helping souls. Among the young clerics were several of good abilities and disposition who gave exceptional promise of doing much for God's glory in the future. These were invited by Father Avila to Salamanca, and maintained there at the expense of his diligent charity, through the whole course of their studies. We shall see them hereafter, in their maturity, well equipped both with virtue and learning, sent by the Servant of God as apostles throughout Spain, to the great profit of souls

and unspeakable advantage of all that large peninsula.

In order to render this salutary reform lasting, Father Avila obtained from the new Bishop, Rojas, the foundation of a College specially designed to prepare exemplary and learned clerics and priests to visit, from time to time, outlying parishes and hamlets, with the object of putting an end to blasphemies, disordinate feasting, strife, and public scandals; and by means of preaching, catechisms, and the frequent use of the sacraments, to cultivate piety and good manners.

Such foundations involved heavy expenses. Father Avila, therefore, persuaded Don Pedro Lopez, the celebrated physician of the Emperor Charles V., who had lately come from Germany to consult him about matters relating to the welfare of his soul, to lend him a large sum of ready money for this most pious and profitable work. It pleased God that this holy man should see the good fruit produced by his charity, when there was afterwards presented to him a band of these new priests who, having been trained in this College of the Assumption, as it was called, and having followed with great piety and learning the course of higher studies, had offered themselves to work in the diocese for the glory of God. When they appeared before him, he embraced them one and all, and exclaimed, "Blessed be God. *Nunc libenter moriar*—Now shall I gladly die."

Moreover, it must not be thought that this struggle single-handed against so many enemies cost Father John little in the way of trials, persecutions and labours. His fierce war against vice was sure to provoke the opposition of those who desired to continue in it, but the charity of God which animated his heart, and to which it belongs to be patient and benignant,

seeking nothing for itself, proved equal to the occasion, so that gaining ground, as it were, inch by inch, he finally remained master of the field. We will only mention two or three particular instances, from which the reader can infer how much he had to bear, and how opposition only acted as a spur to his zeal.

A gentleman, who considered himself offended by some words uttered by Father Avila in one of his sermons, accosted him angrily as he came down from the pulpit, and, after loading him with abuse and reproaches, struck him on the face. At this unlooked-for insult, the holy preacher, without showing any resentment, knelt down with Christian humility and presented the other cheek, declaring that he was ready to suffer any affront for the sake of Jesus Christ. Upon which the offender, with great confusion, coming to himself, threw himself at his feet, weeping bitterly, and asking pardon for the outrage he had been guilty of.

The following occurrence was of a more serious character, though, as it happened, it was not less productive of good in the end. One New Year's day, the feast of the Circumcision, towards evening, the nuns in a certain convent prepared, notwithstanding the fact that day was already closing in, to recite a comedy,[1] and the church was already filled with ladies and gentlemen

[1] The reader must not allow himself to be too readily scandalized by the laxity of ecclesiastical discipline which this story seems to reveal. It is clear that what specially shocked Blessed John of Avila was not the idea of a dramatic representation in a church, but rather the fact that it should take place after dusk, and that nuns should act in it without their religious habit. In most European countries the drama may trace its origin to the religious plays (mystery plays, *autos sacramentales*, &c.) which were so popular in the middle ages. At this period, the beginning of the sixteenth century, secular tragedies and comedies were hardly known, but all the great religious festivals were marked by dramatic representations, which often seem to have developed out of ceremonies and dialogues in their origin strictly liturgical. The *autos sacramentales*, the central action of which always had reference to the Blessed Sacrament, were the most

who had come to see and to hear it. Father Avila, becoming aware of this by an especial illumination, it is said, went there, and the dissatisfaction caused by his arrival, together with the murmurings in which it found expression, can easily be imagined. Any one less courageous than Father Avila would have been deterred from his purpose, but he without hesitating made his way straight to the pulpit, and there denounced, with equal modesty and efficacy, an abuse so unseemly in all its circumstances. The result was that the nuns, either abashed or frightened, immediately lowered the curtain, and putting off their secular dresses resumed their religious habit. In a very short time the church was emptied, and Father Avila, being left alone with the nuns, went on to speak to them with such gentleness and sweetness concerning the unseemliness in the virgin spouses of Jesus Christ of this unrestrained intercourse with persons in the world, that they repented of their fault and went back to their convent weeping bitterly. In the end the Servant of God was enabled to draw great fruit from this incident, nothing less than the return of these Religious to the ancient strict observance, which had fallen into decay.

famous of all, and were enacted on the feast of Corpus Christi. They continued until the end of the eighteenth century, were attended by the whole Spanish Court, and were the occasion of some of the noblest compositions of Lope de Vega and Calderon. Even here the humorous element is often sufficiently prominent, but among the shepherds, the Magi, and their retinue, who were the leading characters of the *autos al nacimiento*, the dramas of Christmastide, there were still greater opportunities for comic episodes and a lighter treatment. It is not surprising, therefore, that a religious play intended for New Year's day should be described as a *comedia*. The Church was not blind to the abuses which could hardly fail to be occasioned by these representations. Severe restrictions were placed upon them by the Council of Toledo, in 1565, *i.e.*, some thirty years after the date of the present chapter. L'Abbé U. Chevallier has recently published, in the *Bulletin d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* of Romans, France, a lengthy *Prosolarium*, or liturgical drama of the thirteenth century, composed in Latin for this very feast of the Circumcision.—[Ed.]

The last instance we propose to quote required still greater courage. Amongst the many worldlings whom the holy man snatched from the jaws of the devil, was a young lady of noble birth but abandoned habits, who, under the pretext of not possessing sufficient means of subsistence of her own, had taken up her quarters for some years in the house of an ecclesiastic of high position, the shameless character of her relations with him causing grave public scandal. She, having been led by Divine mercy to the preaching of Father Avila, was so deeply touched that, horrified at herself and her dissolute conduct, she resolved at any cost to break off the life she was leading. For this purpose she asked counsel and help from Father Avila, and he, though fully aware of the difficulty of the undertaking, with entire trust in God, accepted the task. The first step was to remove the penitent from the influence of her surroundings and place her in a religious house. No sooner did the rich and powerful ecclesiastic know this than his fury broke out like that of a wild beast. Yet the brave heart of the zealous preacher was not dismayed. To secure his prey from any attempt at recapture by force, he obtained the aid of the secular magistracy, and accompanied her with an armed escort on horseback to Montilla, recommending her to the Marchioness de Priego, that she might be protected by her authority. The lady went soon after, by the advice of Father Avila, to Granada, where she found a most liberal friend and kind father in the person of the Archbishop Don Gaspar de Avalos. This illustrious penitent lived for more than thirty years under the guidance of her holy director, and attained to such purity of life that Father Avila, who was so wise, so careful, and so cautious concerning the frequent use of the sacraments, did not hesitate to allow her to communicate daily during many years. The ecclesiastic

having died, she returned to Cordova, where she led a retired life in her own house, advancing continually in the practice of perfection until God called her to Himself by a holy death.

CHAPTER VI.

HE PREACHES IN GRANADA, GAINING MANY SOULS. HE CONFIRMS ST. FRANCIS BORGIA, THEN MARQUIS OF LOMBAY, IN HIS RESOLUTION OF ABANDONING THE COURT. HE CONVERTS ST. JOHN OF GOD, AND LEADS HIM TO PERFECTION BY HIS COUNSELS.

The remarkable change effected in Cordova by the preaching of Blessed John, and the numerous conversions of sinners who were transformed into fervent penitents, acted as a spur to his zeal, prompting him to spend all his energies in the service of others. Inflamed with this celestial fire, he proceeded to Granada, where he was anxiously awaited by the inhabitants, and especially by the Archbishop Don Gaspar de Avalos, a prelate noted throughout Spain for holiness of life and for his ardour in the cause of religion. The humble preacher wished to lodge in the public hospital; but the Archbishop used friendly violence to prevent this, desiring to have him near himself in his palace, that he might be able to see more of him, and get the benefit of his advice.

With regard to his immense labours in preaching, instructing, hearing confessions, and doing all that befitted an apostle for the reformation of that city, we can have no better testimony than that of the Venerable Father Fra Luis of Granada, himself an eye-witness, who writes that it was commonly believed that during all that time God miraculously increased his vigour and redoubled his zeal, so that he never said nor did

anything save with the one object of promoting His glory or of sanctifying souls. All classes of persons found their fervour rekindled by his ardent devotion, and conceived the desire to change their life and habits. Clergy, nobility, and people, touched with real sorrow for their past sins, practised penance, if one may say so, even to excess, and innocent children joining in pious processions, made outward profession of the compunction in their hearts. Many ecclesiastics, abandoning all worldly affairs, went into voluntary exile, away from their homes and relatives, that they might apply themselves undisturbed to the service of God, and to the acquisition of Christian perfection. Others, having resigned lucrative prebends which they enjoyed, gave themselves to the Servant of God to be his spiritual disciples and companions in the Apostolate. The doctors and professors of the College founded in Granada for instruction in sacred science and in the fine arts, becoming enlightened to see the vanity of all other studies but that of practically knowing God and loving Him, made such a strict reform in their lives, that their example proved most useful in restoring discipline amongst the wild young students who attended their lectures, to the great benefit of public order. Gambling, brawls, party feuds, and licentiousness, having thus been banished, the scholars devoted themselves with ardour to the pursuit no less of piety than of secular learning.

The same sensible improvement was perceived both in the nobility and in the people; and Christian virtue, which had long been looked upon with contempt as the superstition of the unmanly and weak-minded, was enabled once more to raise its head and to challenge the respect of all men. Restitution was made of the good name and property of others, inveterate hatreds were quenched, unholy relations were broken off, or

changed to lawful marriage, and public scandals and abuses were removed by the work of the holy preacher. Granada soon scarcely knew itself, so greatly were the inhabitants improved, so much more diligent were they in their attendance at church, so much more assiduous in frequenting services, so much more eager for the Divine Word, so much more constant in the use of the sacraments, so much more devoted to works of mercy, so much more modest; in short, so much more moral and pious.

To the zeal of Father Avila and to his urgent solicitations, were owing both the establishment of the new seminary, which was erected and liberally endowed by the Archbishop for the good education of the clerics of the diocese, also the opening of a new house for elementary religious instruction, and besides these the foundation and good progress made by the Convent of the Incarnation founded by Doña Isabel de Avalos, the sister of the Archbishop, and its first Abbess. By his many sermons preached there, and by numerous letters which he wrote to the nuns, full of heavenly doctrine, which were read from time to time in the community, he awakened such fervour in those Religious, that most of them made great progress in the way of perfection.

Father Luis of Granada, from his own observation, tells us that amongst those whom the holy preacher led to God in that city, were many persons remarkable for holiness and learning, but Father Luis refrains from naming them, as they were still alive when he wrote.

Of the particular conversions brought about by means of the labours of this renowned evangelical worker, we will only relate a few of the most celebrated, of which some special memory has been preserved. One of the sermons of the Servant of God was heard by a young woman, who though of somewhat humble condition, was famous throughout the city for her

rare beauty and marvellous talents. Frightened and remorseful at the words of the zealous preacher which had pierced her heart like burning arrows, she returned home, discarded her vain ornaments, and having obtained leave from her husband to lead a separate life, though under the same roof, each loving the other merely as brother and sister, she, under the guidance of the man of God, entered upon a course of severe penance. She always wore a thick cord tightly drawn round her waist and went barefoot; her ordinary food was a little bread, and a few roots; the bare earth, or a rough plank, was her bed, her disciplines and fastings were frequent and severe, and she spent her time in solitary communion with God, and in bringing up her children in His holy fear, until she ended her days by a saintly death, assisted to the end by Father Avila, to whom she appeared shortly afterwards, letting him know that she had gone direct to Heaven without entering Purgatory.

Another fruit of the zeal and apostolical labours of the Servant of God in Granada was the memorable holiness of a certain Constance of Avila, as she in her humility desired to be called, though she belonged to a well-known family. Having been in the hands of Father Avila from her childhood, she made, by his advice, a vow of perpetual virginity. Growing more and more in fervour, through his public sermons, and through the wise instructions received from him in private, she applied herself diligently to prayer, and to the study of Christian perfection, so that she became a model of every virtue, and especially of contempt of the world. She attained to the age of eighty-eight years, and was the holy master's pupil as long as he lived. Shortly after his death, he appeared to her and said: "Sister, know that through the Divine mercy I am now in glory." She was favoured more than once

by similar visits, and the last time, when she was dying, he made known to her, on God's part, that her salvation was assured.

The change in St. Francis Borgia from a life already good to one of still greater perfection, and the resolution which he formed at the age of twenty-eight to abandon the Court, in company with his wife and children, with the view of withdrawing altogether from the world, whenever he should be free and his own master, must be ascribed in part, if not altogether, to the preaching and counsels of Father Avila.

In the year 1539, the Empress Isabella died unexpectedly of fever after a few days' illness at Toledo. By her rare virtues, and her remarkable beauty, she was the ornament of the time, and a worthy consort of the Emperor Charles V. Don Francis Borgia, then Marquis of Lombay, and first Master of the Horse to the deceased lady, was chosen by the Emperor to escort the dead body to Granada, the burying-place of the Catholic Kings. Upon opening the coffin at Granada in order to make the formal recognition of the remains, it was found that the face once so beautiful, was in an advanced stage of decomposition, an object ghastly to look upon. At this dreadful spectacle Borgia at first remained horror-stricken; then, his mind being opened to understand the perishable nature of all earthly grandeur, reasoning like a true Christian, he deduced that most important conclusion, that he ought no longer to serve a master whose glory was vain and perishable.

He was strongly confirmed in this holy resolution, when Father Avila who had been appointed to deliver the funeral oration the next day, after having praised the dead as she deserved, went on to treat of the subject of human mortality with his accustomed zeal and energy. The soul of Francis, like a tempestuous sea, was agitated by the most violent and contrary affec-

tions of hope, fear, joy, sadness, and the like; and to regain his calm he summoned Father Avila, whose holy life and skill in the direction of souls were known to him. He opened his whole heart and his whole conscience to him, rendering an exact account of his past life and of the inward movements which now agitated his mind. He was not deceived. An expert in the great science of the discernment of spirits like Father Avila, soon sounded the depths of that great soul and recognized its fine temper. He consoled him, relieved his heart of the burden which crushed it, and encouraged him to carry out the holy desires which God in His mercy had given him, prophesying even then the great things which he would one day perform for His glory. At the same time, he prescribed a more exact and perfect method of life to be practised, until God Himself who had called him should open a way, and remove all obstacles, as in fact He did shortly afterwards, with what result is known to all.

Father Avila had a still greater share in the conversion of St. John of God. The incident was so remarkable in all its details that it will not, we think, be unwelcome to our readers if we tell the story at some length, the more so as it greatly redounds to the honour of the Saint whose Life we are writing.

St. John of God was a Portuguese, a native of Monte Maggiore il Nuovo, in the diocese of Evora. His life, up to the age of forty-two, might be called a succession of strange vicissitudes. He followed at different times, the career of shepherd, soldier, day labourer, and shopkeeper. Finally, having begun to wander from city to city, gaining a livelihood by hawking books and pictures, he reached Granada in 1537, precisely at the time when John of Avila was sanctifying that city by his labours. It was the 20th of January, the day dedicated to the glorious martyr, St. Sebastian, whose

feast was kept by the citizens at a hermitage dedicated to the Saint, outside the city, and Father Avila was there to address the people.

The preacher, dwelling with his usual zeal and fervour upon the greatness of the reward prepared by God for those who suffer willingly out of love to Him, and enlarging most earnestly upon the obligation incumbent upon every Christian to devote himself wholly to the service of his Creator, and to die rather than offend Him, John, who was present, was so filled with contrition for his sins, and so deeply penetrated by the words of the preacher, that, being no longer able to contain himself, he left the church, crying with a loud voice: "Mercy, Mercy."

In the extravagance of his remorse he threw himself upon the ground, dashed his head against the wall, and plucked out his beard, hair, and eyebrows, to the wonder and fear of all; then, bounding along like a madman, he rushed off to the gate of the city, and entered it, followed by an immense crowd of people and children, who cried out after him: "The madman, the madman." He arrived, panting, at his shop, where he pulled down the pictures, and gave them away to any one who would have them; he did the same with the religious books, and the worldly ones he tore to pieces. Entering the house, he fetched all the money, and whatever else he had, and divided it amongst the poor, and not content with this, he stripped himself even of his outer garment.

In this plight, barefoot and bareheaded, he began to run through the streets, shouting with a voice like a madman, and, having entered the principal church, threw himself upon his knees, crying out, loudly: "Mercy, my God! mercy, my God! Take pity upon this miserable sinner;" tearing his face the while with his nails and violently beating his breast. Two citizens,

moved with compassion at this sight, approached him, raised him from the ground, comforted him with kind words, and taking him to Father Avila, informed him of what had occurred, leaving them alone together.

John at once threw himself at the feet of the Servant of God, and with floods of tears. "My Father," he said, "behold the greatest scoundrel whom God's goodness suffers to live; behold the most ungrateful wretch on earth." He then made known to him the sins of his whole life, the extraordinary favours which he had received from God, and from His Blessed Mother, and his ingratitude for all these graces. He added, "You must know that several times I should have despaired, if I had not known that the Divine mercy is infinitely greater than my iniquity. I trust therefore that there will be mercy even for me, and as you have been the author of my conversion, I entreat you to be the physician of my infirmities. Dispose of me as you please! I will obey you in all things, as if it were God Himself who commanded me."

Father Avila was filled with wonder and joy at seeing this change of heart and this resolution in God's service. He embraced him, pressed him to his bosom, gave him the kiss of peace, and encouraged him by prudent and gentle words to throw himself into the arms of Divine mercy, which, being admirable in all its dealings, would certainly carry into effect its designs concerning him. In order to strengthen the new penitent in his mastery over self-esteem, he approved of his determination to act so as to be considered a fool by the world; he accepted him henceforth as his disciple, exhorting him above all things to perseverance. He was to have recourse to him in all his needs, and might always count upon his help. In the meantime Father Avila promised to commend him earnestly to God in his prayers.

John, comforted by these words, went away filled with Divine love, and clothed with a new spirit. He at once set to work to persuade the world of his madness. Accordingly he came into the principal square of the town, rolled, flung himself in the gutter, and then began to tell his sins publicly, declaring that as a traitor he deserved to be persecuted, beaten, and ill-treated by all, that he was not fit to stand anywhere but in the mire. Then he began again running and jumping through the streets followed by a crowd of children who pelted him with mud, calling out, "Mad-man."

He persevered for some days in this self-humiliation, absorbed in God, and oblivious of self until weakness from want of food, to which he paid no heed, reduced him to an almost fainting condition. In this state two pious and respectable citizens took him to the Royal Hospital, where lunatics were cared for, requesting those in charge of the establishment to admit him, and treat him in a separate room, allowing no one to see him, where after a few days' rest he might speedily regain his health. The superintendent of the house, who had known him in the city, and who was not aware of what had occurred, moved with pity, received him charitably, and recommended him to the special care of the infirmarians, who washed him clean of the filth with which he had covered himself, clothed him, and contrived to restore some of the strength which he had lost. At that time it was considered that in any case of lunacy, the chief hope of cure lay in subduing the patient's ferocity by means of chains and blows, in order that he might learn to come to his senses by experiencing the unpleasant consequences which attended every outbreak. Accordingly when he showed no signs of improvement after their good treatment, the attendants bound him hand and foot and beat him unmercifully.

Moreover the fervent John, who desired to suffer even for the sake of Jesus Christ, ingeniously found means to arouse their resentment still further, upbraiding them sharply and bitterly for their little charity towards the poor lunatics, seeing that they were well paid by the King expressly to serve them. This was the sober truth, no sane person could have spoken more to the point, but it was so skilfully mixed up by him with ravings and delusions as to appear to be folly. They did indeed give him the treatment which he desired, and in good measure, for he had touched a sore point, and they made him feel the weight of their resentment, beating him cruelly and vindictively in order that he might change his tone and speak with more respect.

Father Avila, having heard of the ill-treatment which he received in the hospital, sent one of his disciples several times to visit him, to congratulate him on his generosity in suffering willingly for that Lord who had endured such excruciating torments for him, and to encourage him to fight like a good soldier, and not desert his post. He in the humility of his repentance received this comfort as a renewal of strength from Heaven, and said, filled with confusion: "Thank my dear Father for his charity towards me, his unworthy son. May God reward him, tell him that he has here in chains a slave whom he has captured in fair and open fight, and ask him not to forget me in his prayers."

However, the brutality of the attendants exceeded all bounds, and they were inhuman enough on occasion to give him more than two thousand blows at once. Father Avila heard of it, and went in person to console him. He found him prepared to persevere in his simulated madness until death, but the prudent director, seeing him so well grounded in humility, commanded him to desist, and after having obtained his liberation, to come to him at Montilla, for the greater service of

God. The humble disciple promptly obeyed; he at once began to show that he had recovered his senses, and was allowed to go about the house, where he ministered day and night to the sick, rendering them of his own accord the meanest and most abject services. Then, having taken leave of the infirmarians and patients, who had in that short space become much attached to him, after thanking them gratefully for their charity towards him, he quitted the hospital to the great sorrow of all its inmates.

He made his way to Montilla, where Father Avila received him most kindly, and kept him with him for several days. John prayed and wept day and night so continually that Father Avila's companion, who was lodged next door, complained that he could not get a wink of sleep, but the Father replied, "Let him alone, John's prayers are of more consequence than your rest; be patient, and do not disturb him." He made a general confession of his whole life to Father Avila, and, with his approval, went on a pilgrimage to the celebrated sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, dressed in rags, barefoot, and bareheaded, with a wallet hanging round his neck and a staff in his hand. Upon his return from Guadalupe, Father Avila told him to go to Granada, where God wished to employ him for His glory. He gave him various instructions for his guidance, especially that he should cultivate the sense of the presence of God; he bade him to keep to one fixed confessor and to do nothing without his advice. In any emergency he was to write to Father Avila himself, and be certain that as he was never absent from his Father's heart, so he might always count upon his aid in time of trouble. John afterwards employed himself in Granada in those great works of Christian charity which rendered him so dear to God, and so well known to the world. He went frequently to Montilla to make

his confession, and to give an account of himself to Father Avila, and his humility and obedience were such, that he would not even enter the city without his leave; but having arrived at the gate he used to send a messenger to him, saying: "Tell my great master and Father that the grievous sinner, John of God, is here, and wishes to speak with him." In the meantime he waited outside, bareheaded, exposed to the burning sun, until he received the required permission.[1]

The Saint also kept up a constant correspondence with him as long as he lived, and in these intimate communications he informed him faithfully and minutely of all that God was pleased to perform in his soul, seeking counsel and encouragement from him in all his needs and labours. Of the letters written by Father Avila to the Saint, some are still extant in print. They are full of spiritual wisdom and breathe a spirit of exalted virtue. From what has been said up to this, it may easily be inferred, that the affection which existed between the city of Granada and the holy priest, John of Avila, was deep and sincere on both sides. Whenever he mentioned it he spoke with admiration of the excellent and tractable character of the citizens, of their natural inclination towards good, their docility to the impulses of the Holy Spirit, together with other similar gifts, whence he was accustomed to call it, in his tender affection, "My Granada." While, on the other side, there was a great charm in hearing the citizens call Father Avila openly, "The peace of Granada." They looked upon him as their common Father, seeing that he had begotten them again to God. They never

[1] By the side of the road which leads from Montilla to Granada, a cross is still standing, and tradition says that at that spot St. John of God used to wait for Father Avila. Having met here, they made their way down to a neighbouring spring; the Father heard his confession, and after conversing for some time about the things of God, they separated, one of them returning to Montilla, and the other to Granada.

met him without crowding round him like loving children, kissing his hand and his garments, asking for his blessing and thanking him gratefully, to the great confusion of his humility, so that all his remonstrances being unable to prevent them, he was compelled to remain shut up indoors, or when charity took him abroad to seek out the most unfrequented paths, where he stole along almost like a fugitive.

The Archbishop, above all, never ceased blessing God for the spiritual succour sent to his aid in the person of Father Avila, and, fearful of losing him, he hardly let a day pass without urging him to take up his abode there for good. "Brother," he said, "you must remain with me, you must promise to do so; you are serving God greatly in this city; what more can you desire?" But neither the earnest entreaties of the Archbishop, nor the offer of a vacant canonry, were sufficient to detain him there. He always answered that he did not belong to himself but to God, and consequently was not in a position to dispose of his own future. However, though he was obliged to leave it in body, he never quitted Granada in heart. Ever and anon during his apostolical journeys, he made his way back to his old home, and always with the same zeal and the same abundant harvest of souls.

CHAPTER VII.

APOSTOLICAL LABOURS OF THE SERVANT OF GOD IN THE TOWN OF ECIJA. STARTLING CONVERSION OF DONA SANCIA CARRILLO, BROUGHT ABOUT BY HIS MEANS.

Amongst the numerous towns of Andalusia in which John of Avila laboured was that of Ecija. The exact year that he visited it and the length of his stay are not clearly known, but it is certain that he preached there more than once, and always with startling success. It would weary the reader if we attempted to describe in detail his apostolical ministry in each place, which was generally pretty much a repetition of the story already told. Abuses were reformed, pious customs introduced, labours and sufferings were everywhere patiently undergone for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We will only remark once for all that there was not a town or district which was not transformed and sanctified when Father Avila came to preach there. This then, being presupposed, we will confine ourselves in future to the most memorable events connected with his mission in each city, making choice of those which rest upon the evidence of persons worthy of credit.

One day as he was mounting the pulpit to preach, he found it so ricketty and insecure as to be in great danger of falling. He was obliged to come down in order that it might be mended; but when he got up into his place again: "We must hope," he remarked, "that God intends to produce some great fruit from

the sermon to-day, since the devil strives so hard to hinder it." Two remarkable results followed. The first was that Father Avila preached that day with such vehemence and ardour that glowing sparks of fire were seen by many to issue from his mouth and rest upon the audience. The second fact, which has been related by the same witnesses, as something which they had carefully observed and noted, was that those upon whom these miraculous sparks lighted, began from that day forth to leave their evil courses and to show a marked amendment in their lives.

Another result of his zeal and counsels was the progress in piety of Doña Eleanor de Ynestrosa, wife of Tello de Aguillar, who belonged to the principal nobility of the city. Whenever the Servant of God visited Ecija she would have him lodge in her house. Constrained to do so by her hospitable importunity he hastened to repay her pious offices with interest. He began to cultivate the spiritual vineyard of her soul, and introduced her to the way of perfection, in which she made great progress, even so far as to be favoured by God with extraordinary gifts and graces. As she was agitated for some time by false apprehensions and idle fears, the holy master wrote several letters to comfort her, full of heavenly doctrine, by the help of which, becoming ever more and more enlightened in mind and strengthened in heart, she was afterwards able to endure for her own great increase in merit the severe trials with which God is wont to refine the virtue of His servants. One of these trials was a loathsome cancer in the breast, which devoured her flesh like a burning fire, and ate its way inwards to the bone. She bore this with invincible fortitude for the last five years of her life. Amidst the excruciating sufferings of this long and uninterrupted martyrdom, filled with holy joy, she never ceased thanking God

for the precious gift which He had bestowed upon her; until, rich in virtues and merits, she ended her life by a holy death.

One of the most famous conversions which distinguished the apostolate of this great minister of the Gospel, one which was all the more talked about because it was so wholly unexpected, was that of Doña Sancia Carrillo, daughter of Don Luis Fernandez di Cordova and Doña Luisa de Aguillar, of the family of the Marquises of Guadalcazar, descended on both sides from an illustrous line of ancestors. This lady was in the flower of her youth, of rare beauty, great vivacity, and in gifts of mind and intellect superior to her sex. She attracted the gaze and the admiration of all, so much so that her fame having reached the Court, the Empress Isabella wished to have her near herself, and made her a lady in waiting. Being still greatly influenced by the love of pleasure and gaiety natural to her age, her beauty, wit, the constant flattery which she received, and the favour she enjoyed with the Empress, completely occupied her thoughts, so that full of self, and caring for nothing else, she studied every new art and device in order to render herself more attractive and conspicuous. However, at the very time that she believed herself on the point of making some brilliant conquest in the centre of the fashionable world, which the Court of the Emperor Charles V. then was, God in His goodness, like a keen hunter lying in ambush for his prey, arrested her progress and made her entirely His own. It came to pass in this way.

Doña Sancia had a brother, named Don Pedro, a priest of most exemplary character, the spiritual disciple of Father Avila, and his inseparable companion in the apostolate. He, disapproving of his sister's very worldly life, urged her continually to make her con-

fession, at least once, to his holy master. After many refusals she at last promised to do so, more with the view of freeing herself from his importunity, than with any wish to profit by it. The time and place were fixed, and true to her promise she came at the appointed hour to the Church of Santa Maria, but elegantly dressed and daintily perfumed as if she were going to a theatre or a ball. The Servant of God received her with the courteous affability and gentleness which his charity knew how to assume, especially when there was question of saving a soul. He listened to her patiently and kindly, giving her every encouragement to open her heart freely to him, and to lay bare the state of her conscience.

When Doña Sancia had finished speaking, Father Avila began, and with what St. Basil happily terms the art of Divine grace, pointed out to her first, her great indebtedness to Divine Goodness for the many and excellent gifts with which He had so richly adorned her, and the strict obligation she was under to show herself grateful to so loving a benefactor; God having thus loved and favoured her for no other end but that she might love Him in return, and give herself entirely to Him. After which preface with a mixture of severity and gentleness that, without wounding, touched her to the quick, he continued: "Where has been hitherto, my dear daughter in Christ, your correspondence to His many graces? By what I see there is all else but God in your heart. Is there anything about you, do you think, to suggest that you are a penitent who comes to ask forgiveness of her sins? What can be the meaning of all this finery, pomp, and display? This is no preparation for sorrow over past offences, but rather a laying oneself out to commit new ones. And besides, whom do you seek to please by all these arts? The world? What can you expect from the world?

The world is a seducer that flatters only to betray. What a hard service the service of the world is, and how niggardly and faithless it is in its rewards! Even if you were to succeed in obtaining its honours, riches, and pleasures, what would all these profit you if your soul were hereafter to be miserably lost for ever? If you only knew what a much better master God is, how much wiser, more faithful, more generous He is towards those who serve Him! He has loved you tenderly from eternity; He became Man, and shed His Blood to redeem your soul; and, in return for a few short years of service, He has prepared for you an everlasting reward. Arise, take courage, be deceived no longer, but choose the better part while yet there is time. Jesus Christ invites you by my mouth, He is waiting for you with open arms; if only you will be His, He will be yours without reserve. Think upon it and make your decision."

While God's holy minister spoke thus to Doña Sancia our Lord made His voice heard in her heart with a still more insistent appeal, which roused her from her deep lethargy, until horrified at the sight of her danger, she began to weep bitterly for her past follies. Her weeping was so vehement, that during the whole time that she remained at the feet of the Servant of God, she could not utter a word, and on leaving could only say, with a voice broken by sobs: "Father, I have already made my decision, as I hope by God's grace you will soon see; but in your charity do not leave me without help."

With this holy resolution in her heart, her eyes filled with tears, and a blush of shame upon her cheek, she returned home in silence, hastened to shut herself up in her room, and there, without tasting food, continued weeping the whole day before a crucifix, asking mercy and forgiveness for her sins, and seeking strength

there at the feet of our Lord to carry out the resolutions she had already made. After this, having thrown aside all vain ornaments, and cut off her fair hair with her own hand, she clothed herself in a simple black woollen dress, with a coarse cloth on her head, and presented herself towards sunset before her parents, informing them of her intentions, and declaring that she was firmly resolved to have nothing more to do with the Court or the world, and to accept no other spouse than Jesus Christ.

At this unexpected apparition her parents were thunderstruck, and at first could scarcely believe their own eyes; but, finding that their daughter persisted in her intention, the whole house was filled with lamentations, and they left nothing unsaid or undone to dissuade her from the course she had resolved upon. They did not, they declared, wish to hinder her from serving God; but such a serious step as this required time for deliberation. A hasty decision could not be a wise one. She ought first to measure her strength, and take into consideration her youth and delicate constitution. Moreover, if she desired to be a saint, could she not become a saint in the world, and perhaps with more merit? The arrangement had already been concluded for her attendance at the Court, and there, without ceasing to procure her own sanctification, she might at the same time further the interests of her family, who had based all their hopes upon her.

Doña Sancia was too stout-hearted and resolute to be influenced by reasonings of this sort. Contradiction only lent strength to her determination, and she persisted that she wished there and then without further delay to shut herself up in one of the severest convents of the city; but, in spite of all her eloquence and all her entreaties, she could not obtain permission for this. It was therefore necessary to make a compromise, and

with the consent of her parents, and the approbation of Father Avila, it was decided to purchase for her a small house, consisting of two little rooms and an oratory, attached to her father's house, where she could live alone with God without going out into the world.

Things having been thus arranged, Doña Sancia, having returned to Guadalcazar, lost no time in entering her longed-for hermitage, without allowing herself even a servant to wait upon her. Her chief care was to drive far from her all thoughts of the world, and even of her relations, as if they were already dead to her. After which, having consecrated herself to God by a vow of perpetual virginity in the hands of Father Avila, she began, with his approval, to torment her body in every possible manner, resolved to reduce it to such a state of subjection that it should be unable in future to war against the spirit.

When in health, her inner garment was a rough hair cloth, which covered her from head to foot, and which she never put off even at night time; she wore a belt round her waist armed with sharp steel points, which penetrated so deeply into her flesh, that after death, cavities were found in her body so wide, that one's fingers could be inserted in them. She kept frequent fasts, and her food at other times consisted of decayed oranges, and the remains of herbs and fruit which the servants threw out into the yard, and which, she went down secretly, at a certain hour of the night to pick out from beneath the other rubbish. Her sleep was of the briefest, and her bed always a bare board, with no other pillow but her book of Meditations, while her rest was interrupted every night partly by long prayers and partly by disciplines to blood. She went nowhere but to the church or to some other devout sanctuary, where she knelt for hours to receive and to adore the Blessed Sacrament.

Her constant occupation was prayer, in which devout exercise she speedily made great progress under the guidance of her holy director, so as to acquire the gift of the most perfect and sublime contemplation, deriving from it a profound understanding of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, and of the ineffable treasures of the Life, Passion, and Death of Jesus Christ. Besides this, she received several visits from our Lord, and from the Blessed Virgin, whom she ever regarded as her devout Mother, as well as from Angels and Saints in Paradise, and especially her Guardian Angel, who appeared constantly before her eyes in visible form.

One day when she was going to the Church of St. Augustine outside the city to receive Holy Communion, she found the way so wearisome and the heat so overpowering, that she was on the point of turning back half-way, when Jesus Christ appeared to her, barefoot, with His face covered with sweat, and said, looking at her kindly, "Daughter, I was not weary of seeking thee, even unto death." Whereupon comforted by the vision, she continued her devout pilgrimage with new vigour. Our Lord appeared to her another time bearing the Cross upon His shoulder, at which sight she threw herself at His feet, and, filled with tender compassion: "Lord," she said, "give that Cross to me," and she stretched out her hand to take it from Him; but the Divine Spouse reproved her lovingly, and answered: "No, no, I do not give my Cross to sluggards;" which served only to increase her love for Him, and her desire to endure new sufferings.

She experienced terrible assaults from the devils, who never ceased frightening her with dreadful apparitions, or disturbing her with the boldest temptations. However, these evil spirits only rendered her victories over them more glorious, for she put them all to flight by setting before them a small wooden cross which had

been blessed, and which had been sent to her by her holy master for this purpose. Having been assailed at night by an unholy illusion, she ran out to throw herself into a tank of cold water which stood in the courtyard of her father's house, and there she remained immersed up to the neck until the diabolical fire had been completely extinguished.

Furthermore, her Divine Spouse, in order to purify her love and enrich her at the same time with new merits, visited her with most painful and strange diseases, so that her flesh began to fall from her in pieces, and the bones and joints became loosened. She was soon a horror to herself, a corpse decomposing before it was dead; and this she had asked from our Lord, that she might in some degree share in the sufferings of His bitter Passion. During the last year of her life, which was the twenty-fifth of her age, Andalusia having been threatened with a general famine for want of water, this pious virgin, urged by fervent charity to her neighbour, offered herself to God as a victim to propitiate His justice, if only He would show mercy to others; and God accepted the sacrifice. A time of plenty followed, but her own diseases increased continually more and more.

Having been warned by God of the day and hour of her approaching death, like a dying flame, which leaps higher and shines more brightly before the moment of extinction, she prepared herself for it by the practice of all the virtues in the most heroic degree. She was assisted to the end by her holy director, who never left her, until her pure spirit winged its way to the bosom of God. She died on the 13th of August, 1537, having not yet completed her twenty-fifth year, in great reputation for sanctity throughout the whole of Andalusia. Immediately after her death, a person highly pleasing to God had the consolation during prayer of beholding

the soul of Doña Sancia amidst a large crowd of virgins, clothed with indescribable glory.

A strange circumstance attended her burial. This humble servant of God had asked our Lord that she might be dragged through the most frequented parts of the city in order that she might more closely resemble her Heavenly Spouse; and if she did not obtain this grace in life, she obtained it after death. Her body was being taken to Cordova, to be interred in the family burying-place in the Church of S. Francisco; but when the mules reached the gate of the city, they set off at such a wild speed as to upset the hearse, and, the coffin being broken near the head, a considerable part of the body protruded, so that she was dragged with her head and arms trailing on the ground as far as the church already mentioned, before the door of which the mules stopped of their own accord. Strange to say after this treatment the body was found not to have received any wound, and her features still wore the happy smile of her last moments. Father Avila was an eye-witness of this occurrence, for he had desired to show a last proof of his love for this blessed soul by accompanying her body to the tomb.

It was to his spiritual child, this spouse of Jesus Christ, that Father Avila addressed his famous Treatise on that verse of the forty-fourth Psalm, *Audi filia, et inclina aurem tuam*, &c., which she always regarded as a most precious treasure, and which she never looked at without finding herself strengthened in spirit, and conceiving fresh desires to perform great things for God. Her life has been written by Father Martin de Roa, of the Society of Jesus. We have only given such a sketch of it here as will suffice to show how admirable must have been the gifts and graces of the master who could train in so short a time souls to such great sanctity.

We will conclude this chapter with an act of heroic humility and patience practised in Ecija by the Servant of God, which drew tears of tender sorrow from the beholders. A royal Commissary had lately arrived in the city to publish the *Cruzada*,[1] according to custom, and in order to render that act more solemn, he had forbidden any one to preach in the town upon the day of publication. Notwithstanding this prohibition, some persons of high position, in order not to deprive the faithful of the great good which resulted from every one of Father Avila's sermons, urged him to deliver his discourse as usual, pledging their word to obtain per-

[1] A *Cruzada* (*Bulla cruciata*), was and is an indult conferring certain Indulgences and exemptions, for instance, from the law of abstinence, which for many centuries past has been granted to all the faithful in Spain upon the fulfilment of certain conditions. Pope Calixtus III., following the example of more than one of his predecessors, considered it his duty to encourage Christian princes in every possible way in their struggle against the Mahometan power which threatened the peace of Christendom. With this object, in 1457, during the reign of Henry, King of Castile, he published a Bull, in virtue of which all those who took up arms against the common enemy, or who paid into the treasury of the King of Castile certain contributions towards the expenses of the war, were entitled to gain an Indulgence applicable both to the living and the dead. This Bull was called, from the object with which it was framed, the *Cruzada*, or Bull of the Cross. The Indulgence was at first granted for a period of five years, but it was afterwards renewed, and the Pope added other immunities to the original grant, notably, exemption from the Church's law of abstinence. In the course of time these contributions originally intended for carrying on the war against the infidel came to form a substantial part of the ordinary revenue of the Spanish crown. Commissaries made an annual visitation of every town and parish in the peninsula, and in return for a contribution graduated according to the rank and circumstances of the individual, they granted to each a document attesting his right to enjoy the privileges specified in the Bull. The pious object, however, with which these offerings were made had not yet been lost sight of in the time of John of Avila, and the collection being in all respects a voluntary one, it was usual for the Commissary to exhort the people to give to this holy work as generously as their means allowed them. This explains the prohibition spoken of in the text by which it was forbidden to preach any sermons on the same day which might distract the attention and divert the alms of the faithful to other channels.—[ED.]

mission from the Commissary. Trusting to this, the Servant of God went into the pulpit, though, for some reason, no leave had been asked. But, before he had ended his sermon, the Commissary having heard in some confused manner that a priest was actually preaching in that church, hastened there, filled with anger; and, having waited at the foot of the pulpit steps for the preacher to come down, not content with loading him with abuse, he finally lost all self-control and struck him a violent blow on the face. This act caused great indignation, and the audience crowding round the Commissary, informed him of the facts, explaining their own neglect, the innocence of the zealous priest, his holiness, and the number of souls that he had won to God. By this time the Commissary had regained his self-possession, and was heartily ashamed of the violence he had shown. He threw himself at the preacher's feet, implored his forgiveness, and tried to kiss his hand. But the Servant of God would not allow it, and in his humility, embracing him tenderly: "Señor," he said, "the fault was entirely mine, and you may be sure of this that I have deserved far worse treatment for my sins than I have received from you."

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS APOSTOLICAL LABOURS IN BAEZA, AND HIS CONSTANT ZEAL IN PROMOTING THE EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG.

No town gained more by the zeal and solicitude of our Apostle than Baeza, in the province and diocese of Jaen. When the Servant of God entered it, it resembled a den of wild beasts, on account of the implacable hatred which had existed for many years between the two noble families of Carvajal and Benavides; who, being the principal people in the place, drew the whole town after them into two hostile factions. So deep and inveterate was this ill-feeling, that they often came to blows, commonly ending in bloodshed, and this notwithstanding the interposition of the royal authority which had several times attempted to bring about a reconciliation. With the spirit of discord, every other evil passion seemed to have broken loose. All restraint was at an end, every law trampled upon, while each man lived according to his own caprice, and followed his own unbridled will.

In the presence of these grievous disorders the holy man felt saddened but not disheartened. The very arduousness of the undertaking gave him courage, and after having debated the matter for several days alone with God, he prepared to open negotiations with men. He first proclaimed to all from the pulpit the divine and peremptory precept of fraternal charity and benevo-

lence, repeatedly inculcating the indispensable necessity of fulfilling it, under pain of eternal damnation. He then treated privately with each party, and urged, threatened, and implored, so effectually, that yielding alike to the force of his reasoning and to the winning tact of his address, both factions not only laid aside their weapons, but abandoning entirely their former animosity, embraced each other in token of reconciliation, with abundant tears of joy and thankfulness. This reconciliation being effected the town at once put on a new aspect, and from a very Babel of confusion, quickly became a Jerusalem of peace. At the same time Father Avila was fully aware that the union of hearts is never of long duration amongst men unless they are firmly united also with God; and therefore, not content with his first success, he left no means untried to secure the entire conversion of the city. For this purpose he prolonged his stay in Baeza beyond the time which had been fixed, and continued to preach on every feast either from the pulpit or in the squares. He heard confessions daily for six, eight, or even ten hours, listening with unwearied patience to all who had recourse to him for direction and counsel, comforting each one, and prescribing for him the rules of a holy life. Many notable conversions followed, especially amongst the nobility, who did their utmost to repair by a good example the scandal which they had formerly caused.

Yet all this did not satisfy the zeal of Father Avila, nor did he consider that he had effected any real good until he had permanently provided, as he had done elsewhere, for the sound education of the young; well knowing that upon this more than upon anything else depend the welfare and preservation of Christian nations. Above all there was one crying need which he took most deeply to heart, and that was to provide

help for those youths who felt themselves called by God to the ecclesiastical state. The higher the perfection was, which their life demanded, the greater protection did they require; out of a good cleric is formed a good priest, who becomes a good head of his parish and pastor of souls, fitted for every sacred ministry in the promotion of Divine worship and sanctification of his people and neighbourhood.

God furthered the pious designs of His faithful servant. Paul III. at that time sat in the Chair of Peter, and amongst those most intimate with, and in constant attendance upon him, was a certain Doctor Rodriguez Lopez, a Spaniard, and native of Baeza, wealthy and devoted to the interests of his fellow-countrymen, besides being a zealous promoter of the public good. With this view he had recently opened in Baeza, at his own expense, a house for the instruction of young children in reading, writing, catechism, and virtuous habits, intending later on to found a public university for the higher sciences, and a special college or seminary for the education of those youths who desired to become ecclesiastics. The distance, however, at which he lived rendered his plan very difficult of execution.

The fame of Father Avila's virtues, and of the signal services he had rendered to the Church in Spain by his apostolical labours, having spread as far as Rome, Lopez resolved at once to avail himself of his help in executing his design. He negotiated the matter with the Pope, and obtained a Brief or Bull for the erection of a new university, with the most ample privileges in conferring degrees, obtaining rights and immunities, and other similar advantages. In this Bull the Pope, having been fully informed of the eminent gifts and merits of Father Avila, constituted him Superior and head of it, trusting him to prescribe, with

his prudence, whatever laws he thought opportune for the good government of the same.

The Bull having reached the hands of the Servant of God in Spain, together with the letters of Lopez, his humility was much troubled at seeing himself entrusted by the Vicar of Christ with so honourable a commission, and addressed by the title of a master in theology, and an eminent preacher of the Divine Word. Yet the spirit of charity and of obedience to the order of a Superior weighed most with him, and he undertook the task. It would be hard to say how much thought, solicitude, and labour, this important work cost the holy man; but we must not omit to mention the admirable disposition of Divine Providence in so uniting the two families of Carvajal and Benavides, that they now combined in giving up certain houses belonging to them in order that these might serve as a foundation for the new university which afterwards proved so beneficial to the town.

Under the direction of Father Avila, large and handsome buildings were raised, part of which were to form the University, with the schools, halls, courts, and whatever else was requisite for the accommodation of the professors and their different public duties; the other part was designed for the use of the students of the Seminary, who were to live together, and be trained up in piety and learning, that they might become in future an honour to the clergy, and the support of the Church and diocese.

As regards the rules to be observed, especially by the clerics in the college, those which he drew up were so well adapted to the state they had entered upon, that, in all that concerned domestic discipline, prayer, the frequentation of the sacraments, the observance of silence, assiduity in study, behaviour, cleanliness, and modesty, nothing more could be desired

even in a religious cloister. In order to instil early in them the true ecclesiastical spirit, and that zeal for the salvation of souls, which should be characteristic of priests, holding the office of mediators between God and the people, a time was assigned for study of the sacred ceremonies, for learning and practising the art of preaching, for visiting the sick in the hospital, and other similar duties.

The statutes laid down for those who frequented the University, were of the like nature, having for their object the prevention of gambling, drunkenness, licentiousness, and brawling, the maintenance and increase of a holy fear of God, as the principle and fount of all true wisdom. Since it is of little use to make laws unless their observance is insisted on, he entrusted this office to two of his spiritual disciples, who had been already named professors, Bernardino de Carleval, and Diego Perez de Valdivia, both of eminent virtue, and worthy of being placed as foundation-stones of that literary edifice. Having thus prepared and put everything in good order, the University was formally opened and the studies commenced.

What the University afterwards effected for the good of the city, diocese, and province, is well known; the report of its virtue soon filled Spain, so that it became a model for imitation. The truth of this may be gathered from the many celebrated men whom it produced, men famous for holiness, for brilliant learning, and for the great deeds they performed in the service of the Church and State.

We need not wonder that this apostolical man should have laboured so strenuously in order that the young might receive a Christian training from their earliest years, and have every facility for instruction in piety and letters; because, long experience had shown him that the numerous vices which inundate a town

and destroy the happiness of families, usually proceed from bad education. Knowing on the one hand the gravity of the evil, and on the other the scarcity of the remedies, he was filled with sorrow and a holy zeal. "Must I then be worn to death," he used to exclaim, "by this unavailing longing in my heart?" Yielding himself up to this holy enthusiasm, he felt assured that he could do nothing more pleasing to God or more efficacious for the public good, than to endeavour during his whole life himself, or by means of others, to repair effectually a disorder of so great magnitude.

Wherever he was invited to go to preach, there was no point he had more at heart than the restoration of the use of the Catechism, which had fallen into neglect, and both in the pulpit and elsewhere he constantly urged its utility and inculcated the practice of it. It was a wonderful and touching sight to watch the holy man, although advanced in years and suffering from habitual infirmities, weighed down too with the labour of preaching and hearing confessions, yet passing along frequently to the different churches and squares to teach large crowds of little children, and more especially poor country people the chief mysteries of the faith, adapting these to their capacity, and bringing them within the range of their comprehension by means of a great variety of comparisons and abundant examples, which greatly pleased his hearers, so that even grown up men crowded round to hear him. The numerous schools still called schools of Christian doctrine, opened in Seville, Cordova, Granada, Alcalà di Guadiana, Ubeda, Cheres, Palma, Ecija, Montilla, and many other places for the service of the public, with competent paid teachers, acknowledged him as their founder and principal promoter. When requested to send his disciples to cultivate other districts by their apostolical ministry, he impressed nothing so strongly upon them

as this work, convinced that it was the most important of all, and one which produced the most valuable results.

For this end he laboured with the same ardour to multiply colleges and seminaries everywhere, in which poor children might be taught piety and human learning from the lowest stage gradually to the highest. Of this character were most of the seminaries and colleges above mentioned, all founded after his advice, and under his direction, through the zeal of the Bishops, or the liberality of rich and pious persons. As there can be little hope of forming good scholars without capable masters to train them, he directed the zeal of the Archbishops of Seville and Granada, and the Bishop of Cordova towards the founding of colleges for young priests, in which they might be prepared by the constant study of human and Divine learning, and the test of rigid examinations, for that important ministry.

Not content with this, when he found well-disposed youths, possessed of more than ordinary capacity, but prevented by their poverty from pursuing a course of study, he used to send them at his own expense to one of the most celebrated universities, taking upon himself the heavy charge of providing them with food and all other necessaries during that length of time.

To these motives, ever before him, we may also attribute his deep and constant love for the Society of Jesus, which had been recently founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola, and confirmed by an Apostolical Bull of the reigning Pontiff, Paul III. The sight of so many young men steeped in vice, with no one to recall them to the right path, or hold out a helping hand to draw them from the mire in which, to their own ruin and that of others, they were plunged, pierced like a sharp thorn into the heart of the Servant of God. On learning, therefore, that the Society of Jesus regarded it as one

of the essential aims of its Institute to found public schools, for the instruction of the young in letters and piety, he was greatly rejoiced, and said: "Blessed be God, who has by means of His servant, Ignatius, effected so well and so permanently, what I in my unworthiness could only have done badly, and but for a short time." Hence his liberal praise of its spirit, his high opinion of its schools, and his ardour in its defence, so that he gladly sent a number of his disciples to assume its habit, and laboured continually to spread and increase it. To his love and zeal principally it owes almost all its colleges and homes in Andalusia; but of this we will speak more fully hereafter, as our gratitude to so great a benefactor requires.

CHAPTER IX.

HE PREACHES IN MONTILLA, ZAFRA, AND OTHER PARTS OF ESTREMADURA, WHERE HE MAKES MANY CONVERSIONS. A BRIEF NOTICE OF THE VENERABLE ANNE OF THE CROSS.

Montilla, a town in the marquisate of Priego, was especially fortunate in having Father Avila long as a resident, and in profiting by his holy example and apostolical ministry. Besides preaching there at various times he abode there permanently for nearly seventeen years, and when he died in the odour of sanctity he left his body to that town in token of the love which he bore it. The Divine and ever-loving providence of God, it would seem, drew him thither that he might become the spiritual director of a particular soul very dear to Him, regarding whom He had formed great designs for His own glory, and this was the Venerable Anne of the Cross, whose noble birth and eminent virtues made her name widely known throughout Europe. To understand this, we must go back a little in our narrative.

When the Servant of God preached the first time in Montilla, during the Lent of 1545, the owner of that property, inherited from his mother, was Don Pedro Fernandez di Cordova y Figueroa, Count of Feria, lately married to the Countess Anna Ponce de Leon, belonging to the family of the Dukes of Arcos. Don Pedro and his wife, observing with their own eyes the

abundant fruit gathered by the holy man in their town, the general confessions alone mounting within that short time to five hundred, were full of joy, and conceived at once that high esteem and tender love for him which they ever after maintained.

Desirous of procuring the same blessing for their other dependents, they succeeded in obtaining him as preacher for the following year in Zafra, another town which belonged to them in the county of Feria. God blessed their pious intentions, and the whole place was much benefited by the zeal of the holy preacher. They themselves made a general confession to him, and placing their consciences entirely in his hands, began to lead, under his direction, so perfect a rule of life that the house quickly assumed the appearance of a religious establishment. Even the most careless servants gave up their gambling, light talk, and idleness, and, after the example of their master and mistress, began to practise exercises of piety and mortification, carrying their zeal so far as to assemble two or three times a week in a large hall to take the discipline in public.

Don Pedro, in particular, made wonderful progress in virtue under the guidance of Father Avila. From early youth he had given no ordinary proofs of the purity, gentleness, and charity of his disposition, although the high position which he occupied in the world had somewhat dazzled his mind. The Emperor, Charles V., a quick discerner of excellence in others, loved him for his rare gifts, and had made him his favourite. No sooner did he fall into the hands of the Servant of God than, enlightened as to the vanity of all earthly greatness, and having refused the honourable post of principal majordomo to the Prince, Don Philip, he withdrew to his estates, with the sole purpose of applying himself to his own sanctification, and that of those under him. God afterwards, as we shall see,

purified his spirit by three years of lingering and painful illness, until being ripe for Heaven, while still in the flower of his age, he closed his life with the precious death of the just man.

We must speak at greater length of the Countess Anne, for the heroic height of sanctity to which she attained tends much to the praise of Father Avila, who continued, as long as he lived, to be her spiritual director. She was the daughter of Don Rodriguez Ponce de Leon, Duke of Arcos, and of Doña Maria Giron of the Counts of Uregna, and was born in Mercena, a lordship of her family, on the 3rd of May, 1527. She was left an orphan when three years old, and was educated by her aunt, Doña Mencia, a matron of notable piety, and sister to Don Henry, Duke of Sidonia. Doña Anna profited by the careful training she received, giving early tokens of great virtue, and her singular modesty, gentleness, and obedience, won for her from all the title of *the lamb*.

When she reached a marriageable age, she felt a strong desire to enter a cloister; but, not wishing to oppose the will of her relations, she was given in marriage in 1542, to Don Pedro Fernandez de Cordova, Count of Feria, and Marquis of Priego, and, in process of time bore him two children, Doña Catalina, whose signal virtues will draw our attention to her later on, and a son, Don Lorenzo, who died within the year.

Doña Anna had been recently married when she came under the direction of Father Avila in Montilla, and she profited by his instructions to so great account that she began to lead henceforth a most perfect life as a wife and mother, firmly intending to become a Religious as soon as she should be free to do so—a day which appeared to be not far off, judging by the frequent and serious illness of the Count her husband.

Meanwhile, the Servant of God had concluded his

Lent preaching in Zafra, with a large harvest of souls; though he remained there for some weeks longer at the earnest wish of the Count and Countess, availing himself of the time to complete some arrangements which he had suggested for the spiritual good of the inhabitants. He continued to preach on feast-days, to instruct children in the catechism, and to explain daily some portion of the canonical epistle of St. John, until other business called him away to Cordova, when the Count and his wife themselves returned to Priego.

Just at this time, the Count's illness increased so much, that, at the close of the year 1548, he became completely helpless. He continued bedridden for three full years, drinking in, as it were, his death potion drop by drop, and alleviating the bitterness of his sufferings by calling to mind the far more terrible sufferings of his Saviour Jesus Christ. Thoroughly resigned to the Divine will, he never ceased blessing God for the honour done him in admitting him to a share of the cross. He was also much comforted by the assiduous attention of his loving wife, who never left him, and seldom took off her clothes at night, that she might be ever ready to serve him. Each of the Count's afflictions pierced her heart like a knife, but however deeply she felt, she always appeared before him with a calm and cheerful countenance, encouraging him by pious exhortations, to gain merit by his pains, with the hope of obtaining a greater reward hereafter.

But death was already close at hand, and being warned of its approach by his anxious wife, he at once sent to inform Father Avila. On his arrival, the first favour which the latter obtained for the sick man was the immediate cessation of the vomiting, the Count having especially desired this that he might be able to receive the Holy Viaticum. He then received all the sacraments of the Church, after which he lived only a

few hours, much comforted by having his dear Father Avila to assist him on his death-bed, and to console him in his agony. He died in 1551; a most truly Christian man, adorned with every virtue, and worthy of being held in lasting remembrance.

As soon as he was dead, the Servant of God passed from the room, with the crucifix in his hand, to find the Countess, and well knowing the steadfastness of her heart and what might be expected from her virtue, said to her in an authoritative and reverent tone: "Lady, accept Him who must henceforth be your only Spouse." Doña Anna understood the meaning of his words, but, overcoming natural weakness with the strength of grace, she took the crucifix into her hand, kissed it repeatedly, and pressed it to her breast; and then taking it with her, went, without a word, to hide herself in the private chapel. Having paid the last honours to her departed husband by a stately funeral, she set out for Montilla, a widow at the age of twenty-four, resolved to abandon the world, and give herself wholly to God.

With the view of fixing irrevocably this her determination, she resolved to take a vow of obedience and place it in the hands of Father Avila, her director; but he, having a firm intention never to receive the obedience of women, would not consent. He ordered her to obey in all things her sister-in-law, Doña Catalina Hernandez de Cordova, Marchioness of Priego, a lady of noble spirit, great sense, and singular piety. This proved sufficient, for during the two years that the Countess remained in the world, she held her sister-in-law in the deepest respect, and rendered her the most exact obedience, doing nothing without her advice and approval.

Nevertheless, she withdrew from time to time, with the consent of Father Avila, to the Convent of St. Clare, that she might hold more uninterrupted communication

with her Lord, and speak to Him at greater length in prayer. During one of these brief periods of solitude our Lord very distinctly invited her to carry His cross, while the seraphic St. Francis exhorted her to assume the habit of the Order; invitations so precious to her that she hastened at once to obey. The devil, as we may be sure, interposed a thousand obstacles to hinder the execution of her design, foreseeing from that moment the total discomfitures he was to experience at her hands. Yet, gaining fresh ground inch by inch, as it were, and having by the help of her holy director overcome every difficulty, in 1553, after two years of widowhood, she turned her back completely on the world, and assumed the religious habit of St. Clare, under the title of Sister Anne of the Cross.

It does not concern the present history to describe in detail the many eminent virtues practised by this valiant woman during the forty-eight years of her life in the cloister. Those who desire to know these, will find the record of them in her Life, written by Father Martin de Roa, of the Society of Jesus. We will merely state, that she attained such heroic virtue that our Lord put it to the proof of severest trials. Not content with having so early taken from her both husband and children, these lights, as it were, of her eyes, He made her a martyr for thirty years to the most painful infirmities. And as though this was not enough, He allowed the devils to torment her for eight entire years, terrifying her with frightful visions, and inflicting terrible blows on her. From the moment that she abandoned the world, it could no longer steal a thought or an affection from her, and her detachment from daughter, son-in-law, his mother, and from every tie of flesh and blood, was so complete as to surprise even the Venerable Father Luis of Granada. She ever regarded herself, both in thought and action, as occupy-

ing the lowest place in the convent; and when any one tried to prevent her fulfilling certain especially humiliating offices, by reminding her of the nobleness of her birth, she replied: "I would much prefer to have remained a countess, than to be at the same time both nun and countess." She was a woman of lofty prayer, and continual union with God; so great was her love of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament that, like a moth circling round the flame, she spent a considerable part of each day in His presence, and passed whole nights kneeling at His feet in prayer.

Having been raised by her Heavenly Spouse to the sublimest contemplation, she penetrated into the most hidden secrets of the Divinity, and the mysteries of our redemption; hence followed copious tears, raptures, ecstasies, faintings, and other supernatural gifts and visions, with which our Lord is wont to repay the fidelity of His servants. Since there is no safe prayer without mortification, these being the two wings which bear the soul to God, that of Sister Anne might almost be called excessive. Notwithstanding her delicate constitution and habitual infirmities, she always wore haircloth next the skin, and rough canvass; a mat spread upon the ground was her bed; she fasted almost daily, and took long and severe disciplines every night. She was so exact as to silence, so recollected, and so observant of even the slightest rules, that in all those years she was never seen to transgress one of them. On account of her charity, she was called by all the Mother of the Poor. When she reasoned with, advised, or comforted others, she increased the fervour of all by her words, and had ever on her lips, the teaching of Father Avila, being accustomed to say: "Thus did my holy master instruct me."

She died full of virtue and merit on the 26th of April, 1601, in the seventy-fourth year of her age,

thirty-one years after the death of Father Avila. Her virtue was esteemed in the highest degree by that great Servant of God, St. Francis Borgia, by Father Luis of Granada, and by the whole of Spain; Father Avila used to say that God had given him that soul to direct for his own profit. From the year 1664, several favourable decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites for the cause of her Beatification were issued under Pope Urban VIII. and Alexander VII.

We will only add a few words concerning the holy daughter of these parents, the young Marchioness Doña Caterina Hernandez de Cordova, wife of Don Alfonso, Marquis of Aquillar, who, under the direction of Father Avila, led a most perfect monastic life in the midst of the world. She had imbibed his spirit from her earliest years, and he directed her conscience from the dawn of reason almost to its setting, for his death preceded hers by only two years.

She was adorned with every virtue which could be desired in a noble lady. She lived in the world, but practised a pious deception on it, for whilst, in order to please her husband, she was richly and handsomely dressed according to her rank, she wore beneath her dress a haircloth armed with sharp points. She took severe disciplines every day; her food was coarse, and only sufficient in quantity to sustain life, and though her table was always covered with abundant and delicate viands, it was solely in order that she might entertain the poor more sumptuously, amongst whom she distributed them.

In the absence of her husband, whose duties frequently summoned him elsewhere, she slept little, and without undressing, upon a bare board. She spent several hours a day in prayer, and also part of the night. When she went to Communion, which was two or three times a week, she passed the whole morning

kneeling unsupported before the Blessed Sacrament, amongst a crowd of the lowest class. Her modesty was so great that she admitted to her director, she had never, in the whole course of her life, looked any man in the face except her husband. In order to practise humility, she used herself to attend upon her servants, sweeping their rooms, making their beds, and rendering them every menial service, especially when ill. She was most liberal of the goods which God had given her, provided precious vestments for almost all the churches on her estates, maintained whole houses of Religious consecrated to God, and bountifully relieved the misery of all who had recourse to her.

So choice a plant could not continue long in the evil atmosphere of this world, therefore it pleased the Divine Husbandman to transplant her into His heavenly vineyard. She died after a few hours' illness, at the age of twenty-seven, rich in merits, and ripe for Heaven. She refused to be buried in the tomb of her ancestors, and was laid at the feet of Father Avila, to whom she always declared she owed, after God, whatever good there was in her soul. It is said that she appeared a few days after her death, clothed with a brightness so radiant as to show plainly she was no more of earth.

In no way inferior to this was the fruit gathered by the Servant of God throughout the marquisate of Priego, and in the county of Feria, which he laboured to cultivate. No sooner was he heard from the pulpit, than the people, in pious fear, entered upon a salutary penitence. Public scandals were at once removed, blasphemy, gambling, enmities, and feastings banished; and bad women who made merchandize of themselves were driven away. The sacraments were frequented, devotion revived, together with reverence for the churches and respect for feasts; so that it was commonly said that with the coming of Father Avila

into those parts the golden age had returned, or more truly, that the fervour of the early Christians had begun to flourish again. Above all, a real reform became manifest in the clergy, both as to gravity of manners and holiness of life, and as to what concerned reverence and decorum in dealing with the Divine Mysteries. The change, moreover, was so abiding, that for a long course of years holy priests abounded in those parts.

This was effected, not so much by the words of the Servant of God as by the example which he set them of every virtue. His virginal modesty, his contempt for earthly things, his evangelical poverty, his constant union with God, the excessive severity with which he treated his body, and the tremendous labours by which he exhausted himself for the glory of God and for the salvation of men, were so many efficacious sermons preached before their eyes, against which they could not without the greatest difficulty have closed them. The proprietors of the estates always prepared a comfortable lodging for him in their palaces, but he would never accept it, and preferred to occupy a small cottage, in company with a good priest, sharing in his scanty supply of common food, and, notwithstanding the intense heat, he never went out except when the duties of his ministry required, or when charity summoned him to the sick or needy in the prisons, hospitals, or elsewhere. The rest of his time he passed shut up in a small and wretched room, and absorbed in prayer to God.

Having sanctified Montilla, Zafra, and the other towns and districts belonging to these noble families, the holy man's zeal could not be satisfied without penetrating into the province of Estremadura, preaching throughout it, and teaching and hearing confessions with the same ardour of spirit and abundant harvest of souls. The very devils, vanquished by the many

defeats which they had sustained from his preaching, and enraged at seeing the prey daily torn from their grasp, gave vent to the most piteous lamentations. The holy man had been out one day to preach at some place in the neighbourhood of Zafra, and was returning to the town towards evening, when both he and his companion heard a voice as of a person grieving over some bitter misfortune. They stopped and looked round, but saw no one. The holy man, nevertheless, desirous of affording some assistance, bade his companion, "Go and see if there be any one in need of help." The latter had only gone a few steps forward when he perceived a group of men clad in sombre garments, of sad and doleful appearance, uttering loud cries. "Who are you?" he asked, "and what evil has befallen you?" But they only replied: "What is that to you, so long as you belong to our mortal enemy, who has overwhelmed us in ruin and has driven us out to-day by his preaching from many souls that have long been ours!" Upon this the man came back precipitately in his alarm to Father Avila, who, when told what had occurred, said to him: "Brother, what are you afraid of? Blessed be God; trust in Him; He is omnipotent, He is with us, and that suffices."

Nor was this the only occasion on which the devil showed so great resentment, and attempted, though unable to do more, to bring discredit on him at least. A gentleman, blinded by love, had long given grave scandal to the whole neighbourhood by a guilty attachment. Having heard a sermon by Father Avila, he was seized with such horror for his past wicked life, that he returned home, threw himself at the feet of a crucifix, and began to weep bitterly over his sins, and to prepare himself for a general confession at the same moment. A stranger entered the apartment, who had come, as he said, to treat with him upon some important

business, and entering into conversation, skilfully turned the subject to the person of Father Avila. The gentleman, on hearing his name mentioned, could not refrain from exclaiming : "Oh, how holy a man Father Avila is! A saintly man, wholly filled with the spirit of God! I do not believe that in all Spain there is another like him. Sad would it have been for me if I had not met with him; it is he who has brought me to myself." "How can a man of your intelligence speak thus?" answered the stranger. "Is it possible that a person so clear-sighted as you are can be deceived by that hypocrite? Believe me, he is an ignorant man, and a deceiver. . . ." He would have continued, had not the gentleman, rising hastily, interrupted him, saying: "Whoever you are, depart, and never dare to enter my house again;" then making the sign of the cross, he added, "You cannot be a man, but a devil," nor was he mistaken. For at that instant there rose a strong blast of wind which shook the whole house, when the man vanished instantaneously and never returned. This incident confirmed the gentleman in his holy resolutions; so that, making his confession to the Servant of God, he began quite a new life under his direction, and after many years, died a holy death.

These and other similar attempts having failed, the evil one afterwards employed as his emissaries men worse than the very devils themselves. The holy man was returning to Zafra from preaching at some place in Estremadura, when he saw in the distance four armed men. His companion, alarmed at the sight, cried out, "Father, let us turn back, those are very evil-looking men." He replied, "Fear not, brother, God is with us, let us go forward." As they approached, the men laid their hands upon their swords, and called upon them in loud tones to give up their purses. But, in the very act of threatening, they were seized with

sudden fear, and remained stupefied and immovable, unable to proceed either backwards or forwards. At this sudden change, the Servant of God, filled with pity for these miscreants, asked them gently and kindly if they needed anything; upon which they burst into tears, and told him that they only desired forgiveness for their wicked design. Father Avila replied, "You must ask mercy and forgiveness from God." He then represented to them in the most pathetic terms the terrible outrage they were guilty of against the Divine Majesty by their wicked lives, and the serious danger in which they stood of eternal damnation. Led by his words to consider their state, and seized with a heartfelt compunction, they promised to abandon their wicked courses, and enter upon a more Christian life.

At other times, the malignant spirits, being unable to give vent to their rage against the holy man himself, attacked his disciples and penitents. A gentleman of great virtue, and a spiritual pupil of Father Avila, was considering in his own room the great grace granted him by God in bringing him within the influence of that holy man, and the great benefits which his soul had received through him; when, suddenly, he saw enter the room a horrible, misshapen beast of enormous size. He was terrified, and tried to call for assistance, but an invisible hand closed his mouth and stifled his words. At the same time one of his ears was seized so violently that he nearly fainted with the pain. Overcome by the acuteness of the agony which he felt, and in dread of suffering worse, he invoked most fervently the holy names of Jesus and Mary. At these powerful names, the foul beast vanished like lightning, and the gentleman found himself unharmed. He afterwards related the incident to Father Avila, who answered, "You should not be surprised, for the devil has long entertained a bitter hatred against you and me, fear

not, for he will not return to torment you henceforth"—words which came true.

Either through lapse of time, or perhaps owing to the negligence of contemporary writers, we have no detailed record of the several towns and districts which were sanctified by the zeal of this famous evangelical labourer; but it is certain that while health and strength lasted, he travelled through the provinces of Seville, Cordova, Granada, Jaen, and Estremadura, preaching, teaching, and hearing confessions, and that he reaped such an abundant harvest of souls for Jesus Christ, as to merit the glorious title of the *Apostle of Andalusia.*

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT FRUIT PRODUCED BY HIS INDEFATIGABLE DILIGENCE IN HEARING CONFESSIONS. HIS ADVICE MOST EAGERLY SOUGHT FOR, AND MOST HIGHLY ESTEEMED.

However great the fruit was which Father Avila produced by his apostolic preaching, his constant practice of hearing confessions was far more productive of fruit in gaining souls for God. He never concluded a sermon without inviting his hearers to cleanse their souls from guilt by sacramental confession, and he thus struck while the iron was hot. For this purpose, when he came down from the pulpit, hot and tired, he proceeded straight to the confessional, to hear the penitents who crowded round him by hundreds, and remained there four or five hours, until he had attended to each one. His fame throughout Spain, as a man singularly holy, and skilful in the direction of souls, induced many persons at a distance to place their conscience in his hands so that the hours of the day proved insufficient, and he was often employed for a considerable part of the night.

It would be difficult to describe the art and skill with which he gained their hearts. When the most abandoned sinners threw themselves at his feet, he received them with the charity and gentleness of Jesus Christ, and with the tenderness of a father; he embraced them, weeping with joy, as if he would wash

away their stains with his tears. Having heard the full list of their sins, he dwelt with great force on the enormity of the wrongs done by them to the Divine Majesty, the monstrous ingratitude which they had shown to so kind a benefactor, and the great danger they incurred of everlasting damnation ; yet at the same time, he enlarged their hearts, encouraging them to cast themselves into the arms of the Divine clemency, and trust an infinitely merciful God, who offered them pardon through his hands ; they must resolve, however, to lead different lives for the time to come, while as regarded the past, he would become surety for them with God. Completely won over and filled with compunction by words so full of gentleness and compassion, they all disclosed their wounds to him offering to undergo any remedy, however painful, were he even to employ fire, or the knife to work their cure.

But this the loving heart of the holy man would not allow : and so by means of mild remedies, he wrought their cure with so much sweetness, that in a short time, almost without their perceiving it, they found themselves restored to health, and quite changed from what they had been. Thus did many witnesses aver that the holy man, by means of his ministry of confession, gained innumerable souls to God, and that no one was ever known to make their confession to him without a permanent improvement in their spiritual state.

When he met with docile and tractable souls, not content with removing them from the mire of guilt he led them, as it were, into the sanctuary, and guiding them along the path of Christian perfection, from being grievous sinners he made them great saints. Besides the instances already mentioned, it is related that a bad priest who had not approached the Sacrament of Penance for eighteen years, happening to go to confession to Father Avila, changed his mode of life so completely,

to the surprise and edification of all, that he became a saint and an apostle.

So great was Father Avila's skill in uprooting from souls every earthly affection, and implanting the love of heavenly riches, that not a few of those who placed themselves under his spiritual guidance, not only ceased to desire worldly advantages, but even renounced rich patrimonies, large prebends, or splendid and lucrative offices which they already enjoyed. His special care was to instil into his penitents, as the foundation of all holiness, great contempt of self, and high esteem for God, two virtues which, when rooted in the heart, bring with them all the rest. Amongst the persons of rank and position whom God led to a state of perfection through his means, we must mention Doña Isabella and Doña Maria Paceco, sisters of the Marchioness de Priego, and Religious of St. Clare in Montilla, who were under his direction for many years, and both of whom died in the odour of sanctity. Of his disciples we will speak elsewhere, only remarking here, that under the rule of such a master they made great progress, and that the lives of several have been written. It is not therefore too much to say that Father John of Avila was one of the most skilful and successful directors of souls who have flourished in God's Holy Church.

He also rendered signal service to others by his wise and mature counsels. In this he was the oracle of his time, "as if a man should consult God." [1] It was well known that all persons remarkable for learning and piety, especially in Spain, who desired to be safe from error in matters of importance, had recourse to him either in person, or by writing. Some undertook journeys of more than a hundred leagues solely for the purpose of consulting him.

Their expectations were not deceived, for, fully

[1] 2 Kings xvi. 23.

equipped with understanding, learning, and experience, having a mind enlightened no less by the lights received in constant prayer, than by the singular gift of counsel infused by God for the benefit of souls, he speedily probed their hearts, discovered the nature, temperament, and inclination of each, and gave to each one the answer adapted to his need, so that none were ever known to have repented of having followed his advice.

To mention a few instances of this. When the Servant of God was at Granada, there arrived in the city, from the Indies, a young cavalier named Don Pedro de la Cerda, who possessed a large fortune, led a dissolute life, and wasted his riches with women of bad character. Father Avila, moved with pity, and full of desire for his conversion, gained access to him. Having won his regard by his amiable manners, and formed a closer intimacy with him, he remarked to him with much earnestness, "Oh, sir, how much better would it not have been to have spent your money with the poor of Jesus Christ, than to have dissipated it in maintaining such wolves as these!" The gentleman, touched by these few words, resolved to amend his life, and he did so in fact. Conferring some months after, with the Servant of God, he informed him of his desire to assume the religious habit. The latter, however, replied, "No, no, religious life was not made for you: do as I bid you, and marry." He did marry, and amongst his other virtues became most liberal in almsgiving, until, after leading a good Christian life for many years, and setting an example of deep piety to the town, he made a holy death.

Two noble persons in Montilla, having been married for twenty years without the birth of any children, agreed that they would enter Religion. They consulted Father Avila, but he replied, "No, God does not wish you to walk in that path; return home, live together in

holy charity, and thus you will be saved; and you," he added to the husband, "come back to see me in two months' time." After that interval the gentleman returned, and his first words were to inform the holy man that his wife had been with child for some weeks. Father Avila replied, "In due time she will give birth to a son. Live in peace, and bring him up in the holy fear of God, for he will enter a Religious Order, and become one of its prominent members." All this was fulfilled, and the parents lived a Christian life in perfect concord until their death.

A young priest suffered grievous temptations against purity. In order to exorcise this domestic demon, he took counsel with Father Avila; who, greatly edified at the good-will of the young man, kept him near him for several days, and supplied him with such preservatives that he was permanently freed from this molestation.

Cardinal Toledo, of the Society of Jesus, when young, wished to devote himself to the study of the law, with the hope that in this profession he might one day relieve the poverty of his family. Having taken counsel with Father Avila, he was asked: "Why not apply yourself to the study of theology? Believe me," said the Father, "in this knowledge you will attain to great eminence." As the young man was without means to put in practice this advice, he sent him to the University of Salamanca, and maintained him there for some years by the help of alms, until he had finished the whole course of his studies. Afterwards he became celebrated for his learning, and in due time was a brilliant member of the Society of Jesus, was advanced to the purple, and to a high position in the Church.

Don Pedro Lopez, a native of Valladolid, the celebrated physician of the Emperor Charles V., was induced by the widespread fame of the singular prudence of Father Avila, to travel from Germany to Spain, and

to place himself entirely in his hands. By his advice, Lopez founded a college for such young students in Cordova, as being called by God to the ecclesiastical life, might there be prepared in piety and learning for making excellent priests in the future. Don Pedro afterwards settled in that town, and living many years, had the satisfaction of beholding the abundant fruit of his liberality.

Father Avila had in his service a youth of good disposition and tender conscience, named John Rodriguez. During the last year of his life, he called him, and said to him: "John, you know my love for you; but I can help you only for a short time longer. If you really wish to serve God, my advice is that you should become a Religious; in that path you will save yourself and become holy." John joined the Carmelites, and having filled many different positions, including that of Provincial, with great reputation for virtue, he died full of years and of merits.

However, the prudence of the Servant of God was not confined to giving sound advice in spiritual matters; upon whatever subject his opinion was asked he gave such well-weighed answers that better could not be obtained. Don Pedro Guerrero, Archbishop of Granada, held his counsel in such high esteem, that he never took any step in the management of his diocese without consulting him as an oracle. He did his very best to induce him to accompany him to the Council of Trent, but the other excused himself on the ground of his habitual infirmities, though he failed not to give him most useful instructions, which were of the utmost service to him in that great assembly. Nay, the Council itself, knowing well the value of his advice, several times applied by letter for his opinion as to the best means to be employed for the reform of the clergy.

Together with this remarkable prudence in the

counsel which he gave, he had a singular talent for affording comfort in afflictions, trials, and temptations. Of whatever nature these were, whether interior or exterior, it sufficed to disclose them to the man of God to receive prompt relief. Having first allowed persons full liberty to explain themselves, he carefully studied each reason alleged, entered into their feelings, and showed the greatest compassion for them, until, having won their confidence and love, he began to comfort them. To one he would say: "Let this cross be dear to you, it is heavy indeed, but remember that the cross is the ladder to paradise." To another, "Why are you for ever at war with your scruples? Where there is no will there is no sin: go on your way rejoicing, fear not." To another, "What do you complain of? If the body is sick, so much the more vigorous will the spirit be; it is a sign that God loves you, and wishes to make trial of your fidelity." "And you," he would say to another, "why all this fear and timidity? God is not a tyrant; but our good Father, who loves us tenderly."

Still more admirable was the masterly way in which the holy man calmed the souls that were agitated by any kind of temptation. More especially against chastity. However troublesome and obstinate these might be, it sufficed to disclose them to him to put them to flight, as if the foul spirit could not endure the presence of that angel in the flesh, who had so frequently conquered it in himself and in others. This is affirmed by numerous witnesses, stating the irrefragable testimony of their own experience. To some who complained of the annoyance caused them by the impure fire, he replied, "What does it matter?" adding his well-known remark: "The temptation is in your power, and you are in God's. Beware of being devils, and tempters to yourselves; as to the rest, Hell itself cannot overcome you if you do not will yourselves to be conquered." Father Peter

Ribadeneira, who by his piety and learning was an illustrious member of the Society of Jesus, asserts, that Master Avila constantly inculcated in similar temptations frequent recourse to the great Mother of God, and a tender devotion to her Immaculate Conception, as the most powerful of all remedies, one found by long experience to be most efficacious in preserving both body and soul from the vice that is opposed to chastity.

The holy man was equally diligent in withstanding the temptations which move us to irascibility, and when, in the transports of sudden anger reason no longer has sway, he was ever ready with some clever stratagem. One man had become suspicious of his wife's fidelity, and, not knowing how to extract this thorn from his heart, he felt himself strongly urged to put her to death; conversing with the Servant of God, he allowed this thought to escape him. "Kill her," replied the holy man, "but how then about the offence against God, and your eternal damnation?" He next endeavoured, though all in vain, to soften the enraged husband, and finally exclaimed, "Let us go to the church; for there is the altar of our Lady; go to her and ask her to enlighten your mind and soften your heart." He went, and presenting himself before the Blessed Virgin, prayed to her as Father Avila had bid him, and he was quickly heard. Abandoning his wicked design, he was delivered from the temptation, and both husband and wife lived henceforth together in peace and in the fear of God.

In Montilla, two persons of honourable position bore such a mortal hatred against each other that their enmity, becoming public and notorious, was a scandal to the whole town. Father Avila, having met the one who had most cause for displeasure with his adversary, endeavoured in the gentlest manner to induce him to turn aside from his hatred and make peace: for in

this way God would be induced to pardon his sins, the whole town would be edified, and he would avoid all the evils which usually accompany such enmities. However, the other, becoming still further embittered, protested, that cost what it might, he must have his revenge, and so saying, they entered the church. The Servant of God then said to the infuriated man, "Can I not obtain this at least from you, that you will recite, at the foot of that holy crucifix, a *Pater* and *Ave*, and listen to what our Lord shall say to you from the cross?" He did so, but before he had concluded that brief prayer, he rose hastily to his feet, and, terrified and trembling, cried out, "Father Avila, where are you? I am ready to make peace; be it your care to reconcile me with my enemy from this hour; I forgive him every provocation, every injury which he has done me, and should he still consider himself offended by me, I place myself in your hands, I am ready to do anything. Oh, Father, if you had seen the severe countenance with which Jesus Christ looked at me from that cross. I do not wish that at the moment of my death the Divine Redeemer should appear angry with me, and refuse me forgiveness for my sins: behold me ready to make peace." Upon hearing this, the Servant of God embraced him, weeping: peace was restored through his mediation, the whole town rejoiced at the event, and the two remained henceforth firm friends to the last.

CHAPTER XI.

HIS DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS, BY MEANS OF WHICH HE FULLY APPROVED THE SPIRIT OF ST. TERESA, AND DISCLOSED THE FALSE HOLINESS OF TWO IMPOSTORS.

Our Lord, who never fails to afford His Spouse, the Church, loving assistance, has, amongst the other gifts imparted to her at all times, bestowed that special and most necessary one of discernment of spirits mentioned by the Apostle, lest her children should mistake tinsel for pure gold, or worthless glass for a gem of great price. This is a supernatural inward light by which God illuminates the mind of those pleasing to Him, enabling them to recognize, both in themselves and others, the interior movements of the soul, and to know them for what they really are, according as they proceed from Divine inspiration, from diabolical illusion, or from mere human impulse.

Since such a gift is one of the *gratiæ gratis datæ*, in the language of the schools, and independent of our merits, it may be granted even to the wicked. Nevertheless, God does not generally bestow it except upon highly spiritual persons, devoted to prayer, and chiefly upon superiors, confessors, or directors of souls, to the end that, studying under guidance of the Holy Ghost and of the Fathers the consciences entrusted to them, they may distinguish between the good and bad spirit, and separate, according to the expression of the

Prophet, *pretiosum a vili;* the devil being a great falsifier of true values, who transforms himself into an angel of light, and upon every opportunity attempts to make the most subtly disguised temptation to evil pass for an impulse of perfect and most heroic holiness.

That Father Avila possessed this heavenly light to an eminent degree has been affirmed by many, and amongst others, by Fra Luis of Granada, so often quoted, who brings forward particular proofs of this, especially in the approval by the Servant of God of the spirit of the holy Mother Teresa of Jesus. Every one knows in what great agitation this illustrious Saint lived for many years, God leading her by ways so high and sublime that they were little understood by men, and were therefore considered by many as suspicious. Afraid of deception, she went on consulting one theologian after another in regard of the wonderful things that God was pleased to operate within her soul. But as in these matters practical and experimental knowledge is of far greater value than mere speculative knowledge, and is acquired not so much by art and by dint of study as by the free gift of God; opinions differed, and her fears, so far from being diminished, were all the more increased.

She was advised to commit all her experiences to writing, and send the account, through her confessors, to Father Avila, who was famous throughout Andalusia for holiness and learning, and was celebrated as a great doctor of mystical theology, and most experienced master in the direction of souls. Following this advice, she wrote down, in the form of an account of her life, a clear description of herself, of her mode of prayer, and of God's whole manner of dealing with her. This having been transmitted to Father Avila, he read and examined it with the accuracy and attention which the document and its author deserved. This done, he

replied in writing: "That he had no reason to doubt, from what he had read in her statement, that the whole was from God, and proceeded from the Good Spirit; nevertheless, it was necessary to be ever in fear of thieves."

The deep learning shown in this letter, its weighty sentences, the clearness and precision with which it speaks of such difficult and abstruse subjects, are so marked, that in the judgment of Monsignor de Yepes, Bishop of Tarragona, the confessor of the Saint, and afterwards the author of her Life, from it may well be inferred how advanced was the spiritual state of him who wrote it. It is therefore printed here in full.

Letter of Father Master John of Avila to Mother Teresa of Jesus.

"The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be ever with your ladyship.

"When I undertook the task of reading the book submitted to me, it was not so much because I considered myself competent to pronounce judgment upon the subjects embraced therein; but rather because I flattered myself that with God's grace I might profit by the teaching which it contained. I have not been able to study it with the leisure necessary for the purpose, but, thanks be to God, I have read it, and have been edified and comforted by it; to say this might suffice, without adding more. Yet the importance of the matter, and the authority of the person who recommended it to me, forbid my dispensing myself from giving my humble opinion respecting it, at least in general.

"The book is in truth not one to be placed in the hands of all, for in some parts the words require to be studied more carefully, and in others the meaning should be stated more clearly. There are certain things

which may be profitable to your own spirit, but would not be so to others who might adopt them, seeing that the particular means by which God guides some, are not intended for all. I have made a note of these and kept them, that I may put them in order as soon as I am able, and I will not fail to send them to your ladyship; but if you knew my infirmities, and my indispensable occupations, you would rather pity me than accuse me of negligence.

"The doctrine as to prayer is, for the most part good, and you may safely follow it.

"In the raptures I find all the signs proper to true raptures.

"The manner by which God teaches the soul without help of the imagination or words, whether interior or exterior, is very sound, and I find no risk therein; St. Augustine discourses very well upon this point.

"Locutions, both interior and exterior, have deceived many in our times, and exterior ones are the less safe. To know that they do not proceed from our own spirit is easy, but to discern whether they proceed from the good or the bad spirit is much more difficult. There are, however, several rules for discerning whether they are of God, one of which is that they be bestowed in time of necessity, or afford great help to the soul; for instance, by encouraging it under temptation or in great diffidence, or, in fine, putting it on its guard against some imminent danger. For, as a good and wise man does not utter words that are not well weighed, much less does God act thus. When, therefore, this is the case here, and the locutions and words are conformable to Holy Scripture, or to the teaching of the Church, it seems to me that the utterances referred to in the said book, are at least, in greater part, from God.

"The visions, whether corporeal or in the imagination, are the most open to doubt, and should by no

means be desired, indeed they should be avoided, as far as possible, even when they come undesired. The person should pray God not to allow her to walk by sight, reserving the vision of Him and of His saints until she be in Heaven; and to conduct her here on earth by the level path, as He leads His true friends. By these and other suitable means such things should be shunned. If, after all this has been done, the visions continue, if the soul derives profit from them, if instead of begetting vanity in the soul they on the contrary lead it to humble itself more and more, if what is said be in conformity with the teaching of the Church, if they last long, and are accompanied by a certain peace of mind which is more easily felt than described, it is not necessary to fly from them.

"Still, no one should depend upon their own judgment in such things, but should at once communicate them to those who can throw light upon the matter. This is the general course to be followed under such circumstances, with hope in God, and if we have the humility to submit ourselves to the opinion of others, He will not allow us to continue deluded, nor to deviate from the right path. Neither should any be alarmed, and promptly condemn these things, if aware that the person to whom they have been granted is not so very perfect; because it is no new thing for God in His goodness to change great sinners into great saints, by allowing them to taste many spiritual consolations, as I have myself seen. Who can set limits to the goodness of God? Especially when these favours are granted, not from merit, nor by reason of superior strength; but, as they frequently are, to the weak. And as they do not make a man more holy, so they are not always bestowed upon the holiest.

"Neither are those in the right who refuse to give credence to these occurrences for no other motive

than because they are high and sublime, it appearing to them incredible that infinite Majesty should condescend to hold such loving intercourse with its creature. It is written that God is love, and if He is love, He is infinite love and infinite goodness; therefore it is not to be wondered at that the excess of His love should seem strange to those who have little acquaintance with it. Although many know of it by faith, yet if they have no experience of God's loving intercourse with those whom He loves, they cannot rightly apprehend to what length this communication may extend. Hence I have often seen persons scandalized on hearing of the marvellous works wrought by God in His creatures. It is far otherwise in their own case, and they cannot bring themselves to believe that God acts differently towards others from what He does towards them, though reason itself demands that this, being the work of love, and of such love as works marvels, it should on that very account be a sign that it proceeds from God, who is wonderful in His works, and especially in those of mercy. Yet such find motives for obstinacy in their unbelief exactly where they ought to see arguments to strengthen their faith, when taken together with the other circumstances which concur in showing the thing to be good.

"It appears to me, therefore, from what I have found in the book, that you have resisted these favours from God, even too resolutely, and that your soul has derived benefit from them, especially by the knowledge thus acquired of your own wretchedness and defects, and by the correction of the latter. They have accompanied you long in your spiritual journey, stimulating you to the love of God, to contempt of self, and to acts of penance! Wherefore, I see no cause to condemn them, and, for my part, I hold them to be good; but with this condition, that you should always be cautious

of trusting to them entirely, especially when they are unusual in form, or when you feel urged to undertake what is extraordinary and difficult; in these and similar cases, credence should be deferred and counsel sought.

"I warn you, moreover, that although these impulses should be from God, others which come from the devil are often mingled with them, you must therefore always be on the watch.

"Besides, even if you know that they are from God, you should not rest in them, because holiness consists in a humble love of God and of our neighbour. These other suggestions, however good, should be held under suspicion, and all care be applied to the study of humility, of the love of God, and holy virtue.

"Moreover, it is necessary that we should not give divine honour to such visions, but only to Jesus Christ in Heaven, or in the Blessed Sacrament. If the vision be of some Saint, you should raise your heart to the Saint in Heaven, and not to what the imagination presents; it suffices if the image conducts you to what is represented thereby.

"I will add, that the things contained in this book happen to persons in our times, with the certainty that they proceed from God, whose hand is not shortened to perform what He did in past times, and in weak vessels, that He may be more highly glorified.

"Pursue your way, but always beware of thieves, and often ask for the right path. Thank our Lord, who has given you His love, self-knowledge, the desire of penance and of the cross, and make little account of those other things; yet they ought not to be despised, since they afford proof that very many of them are from God, while those which are not can do you no harm if you ask advice respecting them.

"I cannot believe that I have written all this through my own strength, for I have none; but your

ladyship's prayers have enabled me to do so. I beg you by the love of our Lord Jesus Christ to recommend me earnestly to Him, for He knows well my great need. With this I ask leave to conclude the present letter, being under the obligation of writing another. May Jesus be glorified by all and in all. Amen."

It would be difficult to describe the consolation afforded to the Saint by this answer, or the perfect calm which it produced in her soul, such as she had never before thoroughly experienced after consulting others.

Very different was the sad result of another case. There lived, in the city of Cordova, a Religious named Magdalene of the Cross, esteemed throughout Spain for a heroine of sanctity, singularly dear to God, so that by order of the Court she was selected to bless the swaddling-clothes of Prince Charles, the eldest son of King Philip II. When Father Avila arrived in the city, and heard that Magdalene was in the habit of receiving visits from great personages, and acting as discerner of spirits in regard of those who had recourse to her, he could not approve a holiness which was constantly accompanied by all this pomp, and which displayed itself so ostentatiously to others. True holiness, especially in a nun, as she is not a debtor to the world, seeks to remain hidden and loves solitude. Feeling suspicious, he began to examine her conduct critically, and became firmly convinced that the lady was a hypocrite, having nothing of the saint about her but the appearance. And because it was of great importance for the good of the souls deceived by her, that the truth should be made known, he frankly replied to those who asked him to visit her: "No, Magdalene of the Cross shall not see me. Spain and the world will soon know what kind of holiness hers is." It was

not long before his prophecy was fulfilled; for she was shortly after discovered to be a woman of evil life, and received merited punishment from the Holy Inquisition.

There dwelt also, in the city of Cordova, a man who had, by saying long prayers in the different churches, gained a reputation for great piety. When praying he gave vent to such deep and dolorous sighs, such loud movements of the lips, and such violent agitation of the arms and whole person, that the people were persuaded these were all divinely wrought, and that the good man was in an ecstasy. One day Father Avila happened to behold this spectacle, and after watching the wretched man attentively for some time, and observing his eccentricities, he approached, and touching him lightly on the shoulder, whispered in his ear: "Brother, cease this dissimulation, God will not accept it; remember that you are speaking to Him who is a God of truth and sees the heart." At this warning, the man was transported with rage, and starting on his feet, rushed like a madman at the Servant of God, crying: "Out of this, bad Christian that you are, devil and tempter of those engaged in prayer to God." While he continued to heap on him every manner of abuse, the Father remained silent and unmoved, and by this means was the fraud of the impostor discovered, in thus attempting to make profit out of his pretended holiness.

But the Servant of God generally used this gift in a manner more in conformity with his character, in promoting the good of souls which were disposed to receive the impressions of the Holy Spirit. Some of his most famous scholars, who lived with him many years, learnt in his school the sublimest spiritual lessons, becoming afterwards priests of consummate perfection and his companions in the apostolate, through which, like him, they brought many souls to salvation. It is

greatly to the honour of Father Avila, and a most striking proof of his holiness that, in each of his disciples, he gained not one soul but many, forming of them a fresh succession of apostles. To him, and to his holy teaching, may be attributed, in great measure, the signal conquest of souls which was made in the kingdom of Spain.

CHAPTER XII.

ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, HAVING INFORMED FATHER AVILA OF THE SERIOUS PERSECUTIONS WHICH THE SOCIETY OF JESUS, FOUNDED BY HIM, WAS UNDERGOING IN SALAMANCA, RECEIVES AN ANSWER GREATLY TO HIS COMFORT. THE LOVE AND FAVOUR SHOWN BY THE HOLY MAN TO THAT ORDER.

BEFORE entering at length upon the matters contained in this chapter, I will justify myself by saying that they are greatly to the honour of the Society of Jesus, of which I, though unworthy, wear the habit. The reader must not imagine that all that I write proceeds merely from the pleasure, natural to every son, of sounding the praises of his own mother. It would be unfair to omit, through false humility, circumstances wherein, perhaps more than anywhere else, the sincerity of Father Avila's zeal shines forth, and his ardent charity to others. There was instituted, in his time, the Society of Jesus, an Order devoted to the service of others, and joyfully welcomed by the whole Catholic world. The Servant of God no sooner became acquainted with it, than he began to love, to favour, and to promote it, and allied himself with it in a holy league, the sole aim of which was to unite their forces together for the discomfiture of Hell, and the spread of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Father Avila had laboured for many years in various parts of Andalusia, sanctifying that province

by his apostolic ministry, and his long experience had shown him the extreme need in which the people stood of some one to instruct them in matters of faith, to implant in them a horror of vice, and to stimulate them to the practice of Christian virtue. Moved by their deplorable condition, there arose in his heart a lively desire to afford some remedy, and his zeal could suggest none more efficacious than the institution of a congregation of exemplary, learned, and zealous priests, who, free from other occupation, should devote themselves to the cultivation of that field by preaching, by catechising, by the administration of the sacraments, and by all other suitable means which true charity is ever ready to employ.

While the Servant of God was engaged in devising a method of carrying out this praiseworthy design, the news reached him that Ignatius of Loyola had founded a new Religious Order, very similar to his ideal, under the name of the Society of Jesus, a kind of reinforcement of fresh militia sent by God for the succour of His Church; and that it had been already confirmed by a Bull of the reigning Pontiff, Paul III. Any other heart than that of Father Avila would have been somewhat disturbed by this news; finding himself anticipated by another in a matter which, had it been accomplished by himself, would have brought him great fame. But, true charity is not ambitious, seeks not itself, and, provided God be glorified, and its neighbour benefited, it rejoices in the good done by others more than by itself; therefore, no sooner was he acquainted with the character of the new Order, its Institute, its ministry, and the means prescribed by its holy founder for the attainment of the end aimed at, than, raising his eyes to Heaven, and shedding tears of consolation, he exclaimed, "Blessed be God! To this giant (St. Ignatius) has been reserved so great a work, the

foundation of such an Order, from which the Church will derive great benefit." How sincerely the holy man said this, can best be seen by quoting part of a letter written some years after from Cordova by Father Michael Turriano to St. Ignatius, in which he speaks as follows: "The opinion of Father Avila which I had formed at a distance, has been confirmed in dealing with him. It has been to me a powerful argument for the sincerity and truthfulness of his mind to see how heartily he approves of the spirit and institute of the Society; and he declares that he does so almost from self-love, it being wholly conformed to the ideal which he had formed. He describes himself as another John, the friend of the Bridegroom, who rejoices for the Bridegroom; as a weak child, who attempts to move a large stone, and has not strength to do so, whereupon a man with powerful sinews intervenes, and moves it easily. He says that it grieves him much that he, being old and sickly, is unable to enter the Society, to which he would be a burden, and not a help; and that he will reinforce it by sending it as many of his disciples as he can." Thus writes Father Turriano. When Father Avila afterwards beheld the exemplary life of the first Fathers of the new Order, their detachment from earthly things, the immense labours which they undertook for the salvation of others, and the great gain of souls daily made by them, his affection for them knew no bounds, he extolled them highly, and declared that such an Order deserved the love and esteem of all, on account of the signal services rendered by it to Christianity.

In pursuance of this, he wrote to the bishops and magistrates of various cities, exhorting them to procure a great benefit to the souls committed to them by founding houses and colleges of these Religious, "certain of possessing in each of them (these are his exact words)

a slave both skilful and faithful, ready to give his very blood and life for their salvation." He called those cities happy, who had the good fortune to possess them. When a college of the Society was founded in Cordova, which the holy man had laboured so strenuously to obtain, he rejoiced greatly, and said, "Now, Lord, I am content: *Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine.*" In attestation of this gladness, he went to spend several days in the college with those Religious, one of whom was St. Francis Borgia, who was paying a passing visit. It was a striking thing to see a man of Father Avila's reputation, acting as the least of all, choosing the most uncomfortable room, serving at table, polishing the kitchen utensils, sweeping, and performing every menial office, competing as it were with Borgia, as to who should humble himself most. The same thing occurred when the college was founded in Montilla by the head men of the town. "Happy Montilla," he exclaimed, "which has made this precious acquisition." And in one of his sermons he himself set before the citizens the great benefits which they would reap in years to come by having the college in their town.

Not being able, as we said, to embrace the Order himself, he sent to the Society, in fulfilment of his promise, many of his disciples, men of great worth, who in process of time became, by their glorious deeds, a great help and ornament to it. On this point, we will relate what happened to Don Antonio de Cordova, brother of the Count de Feria, and a youth of rare talent. Seeing a terrible storm raised against the Society in Salamanca, where he was studying, though he had hitherto loved and respected it, he was thrown into considerable perplexity, whether or not he should continue to hold intercourse with these Religious. Having consulted Father Avila by letter, the Servant of God replied with the highest praise of the Society,

assuring him that the storm which had arisen was the devil's work. He bade him continue to love and value them, and to place his soul under their guidance; he could truly say that his own soul had greatly profited by converse with them. These words, coming from such a man, made so deep an impression upon the well-regulated mind of Cordova, that in less than two years he entered the Society, of which he became a distinguished member.

In short, the Society of Jesus had not, in the whole of Spain, a more loving Father, more efficacious promoter, nor more powerful protector, than Father Avila. It owes to him, and to his good offices, almost all the houses and colleges it possessed in Andalusia. When dying, he would be assisted by no one except the Religious of the Society, to whom he left his body after death, as a pledge of his love; a precious treasure which is still preserved in their ancient church in Montilla.

But, if Father Avila loved and valued the Society of Jesus so highly, no less strong were the love and esteem entertained towards him by its members and by its holy Founder. St. Ignatius never spoke of him save in terms of the highest praise, calling him a man full of God, a great doctor of mystical theology, an excellent master of Christian perfection, to whom innumerable souls owed their salvation. More than once he said of Blessed Avila, that if the Holy Scriptures should ever be lost, they would be recovered in the person of Father Avila. Father Natale having informed him that Master John of Avila had several times conferred with him on the subject of entering the Society, though he never did this on account of his age and feeble health, St. Ignatius replied, "If it might please God that this apostolic man should come to dwell amongst us, we would carry him on our shoulders, like the

Ark of the Covenant, for there are few persons indeed like him."

St. Ignatius never showed more plainly his esteem for Father Avila, than when he had recourse to him in the grievous tribulations which his Religious were enduring in Salamanca. To understand this, we must explain, that the Society had been recently admitted into that city, and had, by their great labours for its welfare, won the affection of all the citizens. Whereupon, a person of great culture, and high reputation, having taken a dislike to it from some motive or other, made every effort to cast odium on its members by the vilest calumnies, and went so far as to denounce them from the pulpit as precursors of Antichrist. Notice of all this matter reached St. Ignatius at Rome, and he knew well that great works will not fail to meet with strong antagonism, for it is the custom with God to inspire them with fresh vigour through these very contradictions. He knew also how necessary, according to the teaching of Scripture, and of the Fathers, is a good name and character for those who employ themselves in promoting the spiritual benefit of others, and therefore he had recourse to Pope Paul III., entreating him to interpose with his authority in their defence. The Holy Father did so promptly and most efficaciously by a Brief addressed to the Apostolic Nuncio, and other documents contained in the annals of the Society.

Meanwhile, in order to possess an able protector in Spain itself, the holy Founder applied to Father Avila, as being one held in high repute throughout the kingdom, for holiness, learning, and zeal for souls. After thanking him in the warmest terms for the many and signal benefits rendered by him to the Society, he informed him in detail of what had occurred at Salamanca and in Rome, stating his reasons for

requesting the aid of the Apostolical See in defence of his children, and sending him a copy of the Pontifical Brief. Lastly, he begged his prayers in a matter which touched so deeply the honour of God, and asked him ever to continue to regard the Society as favourably as he had hitherto done.

Father Avila read the letter of Ignatius with all that charity and tenderness, which might be expected from so holy a man. He replied, that from his first acquaintance with the Society of Jesus, he had regarded it as a work of the Divine Wisdom, and a special gift, bestowed by God upon His Church, in a time of sore need. He thoroughly approved of the action taken in referring to the Vicar of Christ, in order to hold their slanderers in check, but he remarked that from the beginning of the world, vice had always persecuted virtue. God is not so highly pleased by the great undertakings and glorious achievements of His servants, though offered up in His cause, as by their readiness and patience in enduring adversity. There would be much difficulty in discerning between the true servant and the false, were it not for the touch-stone of tribulation. The eagle proves its eaglets by the burning rays of the sun, and good gold never shines more brightly than when purified by fire. Servants must tread the same path as their master, and where the head has passed, there must pass the members also. "On these points," he concludes, "I touch all the more willingly, inasmuch as I am confident that they represent the practice of the holy Society." Such sentiments as these, though already familiar to St. Ignatius, when coming from one so beloved of God, and so highly esteemed by himself, afforded the Saint unspeakable consolation.

Following in the footsteps of its holy Founder, the Society has ever cherished the same feelings of esteem, of love, and of gratitude, for its benefactor. It has

never lost an opportunity of extolling his sanctity of life, his soundness of doctrine, and high merits in the Church, all the glory, in short, of his apostolate. Thus wrote Nicolas Orlandino, in his *History of the Society;* Peter Ribadeneira also in his life of the saintly General, Francis Borgia; John Lorino, in his famous Commentaries upon Holy Scripture; Anthony Possevino, in his learned work on the Sciences, and many other distinguished authors. Numerous writers on spiritual subjects, have likewise enriched their treatises by maxims drawn from the writings of this famous master of perfection.

As a last testimony in proof of what has been said, may be read the loving tribute to his memory placed by the Religious of the Society upon his grave at Montilla.[1]

[1] See conclusion of chapter vi. book ii.

Book II.

ON HIS PARTICULAR VIRTUES. HIS PRECIOUS DEATH. THE MIRACULOUS GRACES OBTAINED THROUGH HIS INTERCESSION.

CHAPTER I.

HIS CHARITY TOWARDS GOD AND TOWARDS HIS NEIGHBOUR.

Since charity towards God is, according to the teaching of the Saints, the form, and, as it were, the soul of all Christian virtues, the beginning and end of evangelical perfection, it is not easy to imagine the great height which it had attained in the generous heart of Father Avila, a man of such eminent holiness, as we have already described. Its first effect was that during the whole course of his life it had preserved him in baptismal innocence, ever accompanied by so great purity of conscience that his spiritual directors often could not find sufficient matter whereon to absolve him. From childhood he avoided whatever might in the slightest degree stain the lily of his virginal purity, fencing it round by the careful custody of his senses, so that at his approach the most ill-bred youths ever used to say, "Let us speak of something else, here comes John of Avila."

Nor was this the case only in his earlier years, when he was most exposed to danger. After he had become a priest, and director of souls, and was no longer young, he never in the least mitigated his virtuous reserve and angelic modesty, but became all the more careful in their observance. He never admitted any woman into his house, whatever her age or position. Those who went there to consult him about the affairs of their soul,

were told to go and wait for him in the church. There he heard them neither in a confessional, unless they came to confession, nor in a secluded place, but seated on some bench in view of all, his own eyes being fixed upon the ground. He was so brief and reserved of speech that Father Alfonso Molina, who had much intercourse with him, declares he never heard him utter an idle word. When at table, where, along with the refreshment of the body, it is allowable to give some relaxation to the mind, his bearing was so modest and recollected that, as Father Luis of Granada says, on arising from it he seemed to be coming from prayer. Father John Villaras, a man of singular perfection, and a worthy pupil of such a master, writes that during the thirty years that he lived with him, he never saw him laugh. These things, however admirable in a solitary, are much more remarkable in a man who, by reason of his apostolical ministry, was constantly engaged with a great number of persons and various kinds of business.

Yet we must not think that his manner of behaviour, everywhere and with all persons, was the result of a discourteous austerity of disposition, for it would be difficult to find one more affable, kind-hearted, or considerate. He used to say that holiness and politeness were two sisters who should go hand in hand. Therefore he received every one with such courtesy, cheerfulness, and gentleness, that at their first meeting he attached them to him, and nearly all were ready to place their consciences in his hands, and most anxious to have him for their director.

It is now time to penetrate further into the heart of this great lover of God, and to become more minutely acquainted with the wonderful effects of the Divine charity that inflamed him. Indeed, if the perfection of love, according to St. Thomas, consists in intimate

union with the beloved, it is no exaggeration to say that Father Avila was never apart from God. Besides the many hours which he spent in the contemplation of heavenly things, in offering the Holy Sacrifice, in the recitation of the canonical hours, in visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and in various other prayers, he was accustomed, in the midst of the most distracting occupations, to raise his heart in frequent aspirations to where alone his true treasure lay. Everything reminded him of God, and spoke to him of His greatness, lovableness, beneficence, and other Divine perfections; so that, having lost all taste for earthly things, and loving only those which were of Heaven, life was a burden to him, and he was accustomed to say with a beaming countenance, "When will it be, O my God, that my spirit, set free from this body of death, will go to behold Thee, and to be transformed into Thee through love!" Hence his frequent loss of the senses, his prolonged ecstasies and faintings, God being pleased to afford to His servant thereby some anticipation of the ineffable riches which He has prepared for His elect in His Kingdom.

From this intimate and familiar communication with God there followed, as a natural result, the filial confidence which the holy man always had in Him, even in the most untoward circumstances; resting upon His loving providence, as a child upon its mother's breast. With this lively faith he gave up his property from the first, not even retaining a fixed income for his slender sustenance, convinced that if his thoughts were placed in God, and in faithful service to Him, this loving Father would never cease to think of him. For the like reason, he always bore calmly the many persecutions raised against him by perverse men, never seeking to escape them through the kind offices of the numerous princes and prelates who, justly esteeming

his great virtue, would have deemed it an honour to assist him.

There was no undertaking, however arduous or expensive, for the promotion of God's glory, which he did not generously embrace. Those who attempted to withdraw him from these by reminding him of his poverty, and of the difficulties they might bring upon him, he would answer with the words, "But God, does He count for nothing? If a rich merchant were to give me letters to all his agents, in order that I might have money at my command, I would consider myself well provided, and safe; should I not, therefore, trust in God, a Lord so much richer, a Friend so much more faithful and infallible in His promises?" He often said that he had never been deceived in this strong reliance. One day, when explaining to some priests that saying of Jesus Christ, *Quærite primum regnum Dei et justitiam ejus, et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis*, he remarked, "Forty years ago, trusting in this Divine promise, I deprived myself of everything, and I have never wanted for anything; on the contrary, I have always had means to provide for others abundantly. What both confounds and encourages me is, that I never give anything to God without His speedily repaying me a hundredfold." His numerous letters, written chiefly to console others, enter much into this matter, and we see therein in what high terms he always speaks of it, calling it the virtue which contributes most to the honour of the Divine Goodness, and is best calculated to encourage the narrowest and most contracted heart in following in the way of the Lord.

According to the measure of his love towards God, was his sorrow at seeing Him so grievously offended. When hearing of the heinous acts of wickedness by which even Christians outraged the Divine Majesty, he wept bitterly, and was inconsolable. Finding no other

outlet for his sorrow, he would take the discipline, and treat his body most unmercifully, saying, "Receive, Lord, this slight reparation, which I, base as I am, offer Thee in proof of the love I bear Thee." At another time he would add, "How is it possible that there can be in the world any one who offends so good a God? My God, enlarge my heart, so that I may love Thee as deeply as others insult Thee, or fulminate against me the thunders of Thy justice, provided only that men pay Thee the respect which is Thy due."

In order to prevent such offences as far as possible, and to promote God's greater glory—that one extrinsic and accidental good which He can receive from His creatures, he undertook immense labours, adopted numberless useful plans, made incredible efforts, battling against constant perils, and sometimes struggling even with death itself. Whenever he inveighed against the deformity of sin, or pressed home the argument how deserving God is of being faithfully loved and served by us, he urged the point with such vehemence, that it was often wonderful he did not break a blood-vessel, and more than once, upon such occasions, sparks of living fire seemed to issue from his mouth while preaching. Reviled, calumniated, and repeatedly subjected to blows, plotted against even to the end of his life, he was never intimidated, and never ceased to maintain and defend God's cause. It was his lifelong desire to shed his blood for Jesus Christ, that he might give Him a more signal proof of his love.

As regards Father Avila's charity to his neighbour, to treat of it worthily would oblige us to go back over his whole history, for his life was a succession of acts of it. Father Luis of Granada writes: "This apostolical man was so transformed into the love of God, and the desire of saving souls, that his thoughts, words, and deeds, were all directed to their everlasting salva-

tion: hence it is difficult to say whether he gained more persons to God by his nervous eloquence, and the forcibleness of his words, or by the loving dealings of his invincible charity."

His anxiety for the spiritual good of others was so deep, that he spared no labour, and left no means untried to benefit them. To save even but one soul he was ready to sacrifice not one, but a thousand, lives. This was his sole desire to the very last, and if God was not pleased to accept this sacrifice, it might have been that He desired to employ him longer for the benefit of others. At the sight of so many who, swept away by the torrent of evil habits, were rushing on to perdition, he would exclaim, quite inconsolable, and weeping bitterly, "Shall it be, Lord, that so many of Thy creatures whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy Precious Blood must perish!"

His prayers, studies, sermons, letters, journeys, in short, all his labours, trials, and persecutions, were directed to the sanctification of others. In imitation of his great advocate, St. Paul, whom he had selected for the example and model of his apostolate, he made himself all things to all men, and refused no one. Even when the indiscreet devotion of some urged them to ask to speak with him at inopportune times, or when he was weary, and needed repose, he had not the heart to send them away. When advised to spare himself a little, he replied, "How can I do that, when I belong not to myself, but to others?"

His kindness in receiving all, his patience in hearing them without any sign of annoyance or disgust, his compassion for their weakness, his salutary instruction, his care for the good of their souls, and his courteousness in assisting them, were the acts of a most loving father. Towards grievous sinners of hardened conscience his heart expanded, he embraced them, and

encouraged them to cast themselves trustingly into the arms of Divine mercy, sure of obtaining forgiveness of the most heinous crimes, if only they were resolved to amend their life. By these means, he not merely rescued a great number of souls from the mire of sin, but led many of them to a high degree of perfection, as we have already described.

When he came across souls of a more callous temperament, already hardened in vice, who, having cast off all Christian modesty, far from feeling shame, did not disguise, but even gloried in their sins, finding that no gentleness on his part could conquer them, he put forth, after the pattern of St. Paul, a salutary vigour, going so far as to implore the aid of magistrates and bishops, in order that they might at least be prevented from infecting others by their scandalous conduct. By this means he obtained from the Lords of Priego the banishment of all abandoned women out of their estates. On one occasion he ventured thus to repress the audacity of a high ecclesiastic, who shamelessly attempted to prevent the conversion of a woman of this class, and did not allow himself to be terrified by his menaces, though he threatened him with death.

The same desire to benefit the souls of others, made him employ a holy liberty in correcting their defects; such corrections being a sharp tonic, mingled, however, with a sweetness that, so far from offending those whom he corrected, only made them love him the more, so that many placed their conscience in his keeping from that moment. In like manner he reproved two of the most notable prelates in Spain, one because the excessive culture he bestowed upon his villa tended to the prejudice of the poor; the other, because he had amongst his pictures one little becoming to the holiness of his state. Both of these being warned with paternal charity, and in the most discreet and humble terms,

instead of resenting it, thanked him, and promised amendment, telling him that they would love him all the more tenderly in future, and guide themselves by his advice. The same good resulted from a reproof which he gave to a young parish priest, who was ostentatiously vain in his dress. As he was passing Father Avila one day, dressed in silk, and with great parade, the latter gently plucked him by the sleeve, saying, half-jokingly, "Signor Parroco, the rustle of this dress will alarm your sheep." The other comprehended the full meaning of these words, and taking the kind correction in good part, changed both his mode of dress and his habit of life, and, under the direction of Father Avila, became henceforth quite a different man. When any one ventured to censure the conduct of another in his presence, he used to say, "Come, come," grasping the while the arms of his chair with both hands, "Let us allow him thirty days time, and let him then answer for himself." In this way did he at once put an end to the conversation. The effect of so gentle a manner, and of the many kindly contrivances which his charity suggested to him, was that no one ever left his company without wishing to become holy.

In truth, so great was Father Avila's longing to benefit all, that he was ever studying fresh means of adding fuel to the fire. Not satisfied with preaching frequently to large audiences, with administering the sacrament of Penance daily for many hours, absolving sinners, and leading souls to perfection, he gave expositions of Holy Scripture from the pulpit, he instructed young children and rough peasants by catechisms, either in church or in the public squares; he sanctified monasteries, bringing them back to the old observances which had decayed; he allayed enmities, and restored peace to families. By the alms which he received, he maintained many poor youths, that by the study of

religion and the sciences they might qualify themselves to serve the Church. He never ceased to urge upon bishops and magistrates in the cities, the duty of erecting colleges, seminaries, and other public institutions for the good education of youth, and the formation of faithful parish priests. Upon these two provisions, the holy man well understood, depend the permanent improvement of morals, and the true happiness of the people. In addition to all this, he continually visited the prisons, hospitals, and the sick in private houses, consoling, instructing, and ameliorating their condition, and in bringing them all to God.

No less did the Servant of God benefit others by his letters than by his personal presence. These instilled the principles of Christian perfection into all, and indicated clearly the ardent charity which the writer bore towards those to whom they were addressed. I will quote here the opinion of two well-known authorities, and first the celebrated Luis of Granada, who writes: "Every competent judge who reads these letters, and takes into account the variety of the matter, the dignity of the language, the force of the reasoning, the amount of Scripture treated of in it, and, above all, the ease and readiness of its composition, will at once recognize the presence of the finger of God."

Elsewhere he remarks, "God has bestowed upon him such grace in the use of his pen, and such delicacy of perception, that either of these might be trusted to provide the true remedy for every kind of spiritual need and difficulty." The other writer we would name is Father Anthony Possevino, of the Society of Jesus, who says as follows: "These letters have truly a heavenly character in them, and show clearly that they are dictated by God, for in addition to the profound learning, prudence, and discretion which they manifest, may be found the unction of the Holy Spirit. In studying them we feel

excited to devotion. No one can read them without deriving some notable fruit from them, and this many declare who have experienced their wonderful effects in themselves."

As, however, the most attractive bait for winning souls is the supplying their bodily needs, Father Avila observed due diligence in providing this means also. There was compassion in that heart for every kind of misery, and the wretched always received relief from his hand. Besides his own patrimony, which had been all distributed to the poor, the universal estimation in which he was held as a man singularly holy, caused many to believe that alms bestowed through his means were all the more meritorious. Hence large sums of money were often entrusted to him by rich persons, to be employed at his discretion for the relief of the necessitous; and to this object he devoted them, taking care, nevertheless, that the alms bestowed upon the body should always prove advantageous to the soul.

It has been already narrated that he was touched with pity at the sight of a number of youths of good abilities but scanty means, who, becoming indifferent through idleness, were on their way to ruin, and he maintained many such for several years at his expense in the public Universities, to study religion and secular learning, until, having become trained men, they were fitted to be a help and ornament to their city and to the church. When any women of abandoned life wished to abandon their sin and return to God, they were sure to find in him a kind father, and he maintained several of these for ten, twenty, or even thirty years. To some noble but decayed families he secretly supplied a monthly allowance, that they might have wherewith to live without the shame of being forced to beg. He never visited the prisons, hospitals, or the sick and poor in other places, without being moved by

the sight of their misery to administer charity to them. On learning that the building of the large hospital at Granada was proceeding slowly for want of money, he not only sent a large sum immediately, but never ceased to help its funds until it was completed.

His house was the refuge of the poor, and the resort of all who were in want of bread, clothes, bedding, &c., and they never went away empty-handed. Amongst other remarkable cases the following may be mentioned. The licentiate Don Pedro de la Fuente had fallen into extreme poverty, and his high birth did not permit of his going about requesting arms publicly. He had recourse to the Servant of God, and secretly related to him the depth of his poverty. The holy man listened to him with his usual kindness, and said, "Look under that bed, and you will find a basket: take it, God has kept it for you, since no one has come to ask for alms during this last fortnight." The other took it, and found it filled with money. But, in truth, the number of similar cases prevents their being any longer marvels. When, as occasionally happened, the holy man had not the means at hand to relieve them, he sent them to some pious matrons, or other rich penitents of his, who supplied their needs, and reputed themselves his debtors for affording them an opportunity of co-operating with him in relieving the poor.

CHAPTER II.

OF HIS PRAYER AND SUBLIME CONTEMPLATION.

Every one who has made himself intimately acquainted with Father Avila's practice and writings in the matter of prayer, must acknowledge that he was one of the most eminent and enlightened contemplatives the Church has possessed for many years. In truth he should be classed among such saints as St. Peter of Alcantara, St. Teresa, St. Francis Borgia, and other famous doctors in this Divine science, and therefore competent judges on such a question. He obtained, or rather, to say the truth, almost forced this gift from the hand of God by his strength of will, sparing himself no fatigue nor allowing any means to escape him which might at all help him to acquire this close intercourse with his Lord. To this end he kept ever in view those three offices which, in a very particular way, bound him to apply himself to so holy an exercise. The first of these was his priesthood, which constitutes him who is invested with it a mediator between earth and Heaven, one set apart in his public capacity to treat with God of the most important concerns of men's souls. The second of these offices was that of evangelical preacher, a ministry that could be neither worthily nor profitably exercised without union of the mind with God, from whom all his efficacy and vigour must be drawn. The third office which he dwelt upon was that of a director of souls, a charge which, more

than any other, stood in need of heavenly light, in order to detect all the snares which the devil lays in the way of those who would follow Christian perfection, and to become familiar with the different means of securing the attainment of this perfection.

With pious prevention the early dawn found him already on his knees before a large crucifix, where he meditated for two hours on the eternal truths and Divine mysteries. Then after reciting the Canonical Hours, a long preparation for Mass followed, the time of which had no other limit than that of his fervour, and was often prolonged, without his perceiving it, by his abundance of tears, by the abstraction of his senses and his frequent ecstasies. His Mass having been finished, he devoted at least an hour to his thanksgiving, accompanied by such absorption of mind and intensity of devotion, that violence was often necessary in order to awake his attention. The study of the inspired Scriptures and of the holy Fathers next took up a large share of his time, so much so that the whole morning down to nearly two hours after dinner, was occupied either in recollection alone with God, or in the study of the science of the saints, without admitting in all that space any discussion of external affairs, however important, with the exception only of those days in which he had to preach, or those occasions when charity or some duty of a higher order obliged him to dispense with the rule he had set himself.

After spending the rest of the day in the service of his neighbour, he returned at the approach of night to the foot of his crucifix and there gave other two hours to prayer, adding some particular devotions which kept him long occupied, for he was not accustomed to sleep beyond three or perhaps four hours at the most. The nights of Thursday and Friday were spent by him in continual prayer throughout the whole

year, and he used to say that the man who could sleep during the nights on which our Divine Redeemer lay either imprisoned or in the state of death, little understood his obligations towards so great a benefactor. His very sermons were the fruit rather of prayer than of study; for, having drawn up on paper only a brief sketch of the argument to be discussed, along with the reasons, the texts from Scripture and the passages from the Fathers with which it was to be seasoned, so to speak, and developed, he then placed himself before the crucifix, where he often remained immovable the whole night in consultation with his crucified Lord how he should treat his subject before his audience on the morrow.

I would not willingly omit here an incident that occurred in Granada and is worthy of attention. A preacher of great fame had delivered in the Cathedral a sermon stuffed with such strange conceits as to attract general admiration. Having heard of this, the Archbishop, Don Pedro Guerrero, caring more for the benefit to his flock than for the applause gained by the preacher, requested Father Avila to preach upon the next feast, which happened to be on the morrow. The holy man at first excused himself, out of deep humility; but as the Archbishop insisted, it was his place to obey. Shutting himself up in his room it was observed that he passed the whole night in prayer on his knees before the crucifix. With no other preparation, he mounted the pulpit the next day, and preached so earnestly, that he drew tears of compunction from the numerous audience assembled to hear him, many of whom did penance for their sins, and adopted thenceforth a new mode of life.

In proportion as his infirmities gradually obliged him to give up his more fatiguing undertakings for the service of others, he remained all the longer in prayer

to his Lord, without losing sight of the interest of his neighbour, on behalf of whom he earnestly besought the Divine Majesty with prayers and tears; and as the sharpest thorn which pierced his heart was the terrible excesses committed against so good a God, and the irreparable loss of thousands of souls which had been bought with the Blood of their Redeemer, so being completely forgetful of self, he offered himself as a victim of propitiation for the sins of the people, and for the salvation of all.

It would be difficult to find any moment in which Father Avila was not engaged in prayer or in close union with God, even when most deeply taken up with the service of others. He resembled the sun, which, without leaving the heavens, not the less benefits the earth with its heat; or those celestial spirits who, while ever fixed on the vision of God, are yet ceaselessly active for the benefit of men. Besides walking constantly in the Divine presence, and directing everything he did to God's glory, he was accustomed to offer up frequent aspirations and ejaculatory prayers, even amidst the most engrossing occupations, together with elevations of mind and heart to the supreme good. Father Luis of Granada, who was his guest for several days, says that the holy man always rose from table as one who had refreshed himself by prolonged and devout prayer. When requested to give advice, he never replied without first consulting God as to the answer to be given. He never commenced any, even the least, thing, without previous recourse to prayer. In short, he seemed to live only by prayer, carrying out in practice his well-known and oft-repeated saying, "That prayer is as necessary to the soul, in order to obtain the grace of God and the Christian virtues, as water is to the earth for the production of its fruits."

He always endeavoured to impress this love of

prayer upon his spiritual children, and upon others who came to confer with him concerning the affairs of their soul. In writing to Don Juan Manuel, a gentleman belonging to the highest nobility in Cordova, and Lord of Calatrava, he said: "My lord, if you wish efficaciously to escape from sin, seclude yourself for a season from the bustle of the gay world, and apply yourself to prayer." Likewise, in a discourse to some students at Granada, he says: "How much more pleased I should be if your knees were hardened with prayer, than your eyes weakened through study." To one of his spiritual disciples who had given him an account of his daily occupations, he said: "Brother, a little less study, and a little more prayer; in this way you will learn much within a brief space, God becomes better known, and the art is acquired of exercising charity towards our neighbour." In every sermon, letter, or private instruction, he inculcated always and upon all persons, the practice of the holy exercise of prayer.

The adorable mysteries of our redemption formed the most frequent subject of his meditations; concerning these he attained to the most lofty insight, penetrating the innermost secrets regarding the Word made Flesh, His incomprehensible greatness, and the immense treasures which we possess in Him. Hence he drew that intense love for the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, the dearest objects of his thoughts and affections, and most welcome argument for his public and private discourses, in the treatment of which, more than any other subject, his eloquence shone conspicuously, protesting with the Apostle: "I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."[1] He never fixed his regard on his crucified Lord without melting into tears of the tenderest

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 2.

devotion. From that sight he derived a remarkable vigour of spirit wherewith to undertake any enterprise, no matter how arduous, for His glory; from that he drew that great light whereby he guided souls along the hardest and sublimest ways of evangelical perfection; the sight of that sweetened the bitterness of his pains and of his trials; finally, from it he learnt humility, patience, gentleness, the love of God and man.

He taught, as Father Luis of Granada relates, that we ought to go to prayer more in order to listen than to speak, rather to exercise the affections of the will than to speculate with the intellect. In consideration of our unworthiness, we should not so much speak with God, as remain reverently and respectfully before Him, with a timorous and yet loving heart, waiting, "in silence and in hope,"[1] for the supply of our needs from His Divine mercy; in the guise of a wounded mendicant, who solicits alms at the door of a rich man by the mere display of his sores. In accordance with such teaching, the holy man used to kneel bareheaded before the crucifix, clinging lovingly to the feet of our Lord, waiting in holy humility until his good God should deign to communicate with him, and admit him to an audience. How agreeable this method of prayer was to the Divine Majesty may be inferred from the continual and remarkable gifts granted to His servant, and the rich treasures of grace poured out upon him.

There is a constant tradition, confirmed on oath by those who assert that they heard it from the lips of many disciples of the Servant of God, that once the holy figure of the crucifix, before which he was praying, spoke to him audibly, saying: "John, thy sins are forgiven thee."

When praying, his countenance or whole person

[1] Isaias xxx. 15.

was often seen encircled with light; he always came from prayer with an expression which clearly showed that he had been conversing with God. On one occasion, having travelled the whole day, he arrived about nightfall at an inn, and shut himself up at once in his room; a child chancing to enter this room after, came out again quickly, crying: "Help, for the stranger priest is wrapped in fire burning everything." The people of the house, having hastened to the room, found no fire, but a brilliant celestial light which completely encircled the Father.

Loss of sense, faintings, and elevations of the body from the ground, were in his case deprived of wonder through their frequency. An eye-witness states upon oath, that one day on passing his oratory, he beheld the Servant of God in prayer, with his body raised in the air more than an ell, having his eyes immovably fixed on the crucifix. Upon describing this to his brother-in-law, a servant of Father Avila, the latter replied that this was no novelty, but of almost daily occurrence, and that often when he went to call him, he failed to rouse him either by loudness of voice or by shaking him.

His loving Lord deigned to appear to him several times, and to converse with him as with an intimate friend, at one time unfolding to him the most abstruse mysteries of His Divinity, at another, manifesting to him the most hidden secrets of other hearts, and giving him a knowledge of future things. His humility strove to conceal these favours, but God so disposed it for His own glory, that the Father once unintentionally allowed something of the truth to escape from his lips. The little that is known, reveals to us how much remains untold.

While at Baeza, it was the holy man's custom to go to say Mass once a week at a hermitage at some

distance from the town. One morning, on his way thither, absorbed in contemplation of this great Mystery, a pilgrim suddenly appeared by his side, and, saluting him courteously, inquired where he was going. He replied, "To say Mass at such a place; but I scarcely know if I shall be able to do so, on account of the extraordinary weakness which I feel." "Go on courageously," answered the other, "for the greater the fatigue, so much the greater will be the reward." To this he replied, "I wish to do so, but I cannot, I am completely exhausted." The pilgrim then uncovered his wounded breast and said: "And I, when I received these wounds, was more weary than thou art," and so saying, disappeared. These words were both a reproof and an encouragement; for the presence of the Redeemer infused such new strength, that Father Avila pursued his way easily, offered the Holy Sacrifice, and returned to the house at which he lodged.

Another fruit of his diligent prayer was his tender devotion to the Holy Ghost, whose wonderful operations he continually experienced in himself. His sublime treatment of this subject in the five treatises which he wrote gave clear proof that his learning was a gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit, and not acquired by dint of hard study. He used to call the week which precedes Pentecost, *his holy week*, to be spent in prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other good works, in preparation for receiving in greater fulness the outpouring of His heavenly gifts. He often made these the subject of his preaching, and of his private instructions, and was wont to say, with a beaming countenance: "Oh, if I could but kindle within you some devotion to this truly consoling Spirit! I feel certain that in a few hours you would become completely changed; open your heart to Him, and allow Him to imprint His Divine teaching upon you, and you will see."

He had also the greatest esteem and love for the Blessed Virgin, which he had acquired by long meditation upon her lofty prerogatives and supernatural virtue. He paid her the greatest homage, and left no means untried to induce others to honour her as she deserved. He wrote nine long treatises, with the view of instilling into others the same sentiments as those he cherished towards her himself. He promoted, as far as possible, the honour due to her Immaculate Conception, a mystery most dear to him, and of which he availed himself as the most efficacious means of impressing upon the young, love for holy purity. When young girls went to consult him concerning the choice of a state of life, he used to say to them, "How do you love Mary?" And if they replied that they loved her dearly, he said, "If you love this Queen of Virgins, and really wish to afford her pleasure, choose Jesus for your Spouse." In this gentle way he withdrew many of these innocent souls from the perils of the world, and filled the holy cloisters with them. Having been asked to preach in Granada in aid of the construction of a church in honour of the Mother of God, he did so with such ardour and energy, that not a few, having no ready money, sold their furniture in order to assist in this work.

In proportion to his love and esteem for our Lady, was his filial affection for her as his most dear mother. In her hands he had placed himself and all that he possessed, assured by long experience that he would always have in her a powerful mediatrix with her Divine Son, and would thus obtain all that he desired for himself and for others.

CHAPTER III.

HIS TENDER DEVOTION TO THE HOLY EUCHARIST, AND THE ARDOUR WITH WHICH HE PROMOTED IT IN OTHERS. HIS OPINION CONCERNING FREQUENT COMMUNION.

If it be true that where our treasure is, there our heart is also, the Blessed Sacrament of the altar must certainly be called the treasure of Father Avila, as it was ever the centre of all his thoughts and affections; so that he might well be named the Saint of the Blessed Sacrament. It is no exaggeration to say that this noble sympathy with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, seemed almost born with him, for while still a very young child it was his delight to spend hours kneeling at His feet. After he had once tasted this Heavenly Food, he never ceased to partake of it as frequently as he was allowed. So many and so great were the interior consolations which inundated his soul in his Communions, that for a long space of time he could neither think nor talk of anything else. When one spoke to him of the difficulty of sympathy with this great Mystery, he ingenuously admitted that to him it offered so little difficulty that he sometimes feared his faith in It was devoid of merit; so sweet and easy did it come to him, by reason of the celestial favours which he received therefrom, and the marvellous effects which he experienced.

He never went out of doors, nor passed a church, without entering it to salute his Lord; and when he

set foot on the threshold, he immediately prostrated himself in adoration. It was his earnest wish through life to be able to dwell permanently close to the Blessed Sacrament. He therefore envied Religious, whose happy lot it is to do so, who can go to greet our Lord at any hour without leaving the house, and can converse with Him at will. At Cordova, where he lodged in the hospital, a room was assigned him which had a small window looking on the altar, where the Holy Eucharist was reserved for the convenience of the sick. This room appeared to him like Paradise; and it was observed that besides all his free time during the day, he spent whole nights in prayer, unable to leave it even when summoned to take necessary refreshment.

It was only his desire to receive our Lord frequently that overcame the repugnance caused by his humility to being promoted to the priesthood. On hearing one of his disciples remark that were Jerusalem now in the hands of Christians what a happy thing it would be to spend one's life among those holy spots, once consecrated by the labours, sweat, and blood, of our loving Redeemer; so far from being edified, he replied, "Have we not the same Divine Lord sacramentally present upon our altars? What more can we desire? For my part, I never think of the Blessed Sacrament without feeling every other wish, however holy, extinguished within me." The mere mention of this ineffable Mystery was sufficient to make his face glow, and to melt him to tears, and he would exclaim, as if beside himself: "Oh, great stroke of love! Oh, great stroke of love!"

When admitted to the priesthood, his new dignity was accompanied with still greater fervour, and he seemed to rise as it were above himself. His first great employment of the day, and the function which was his chief care, was offering the Holy Sacrifice,

Hence, his whole morning prayer of two hours was a preparation for holy Mass, upon the termination of which, he spent another hour in thanksgiving, and in treating with his Lord concerning the interests of his soul, being accustomed to say, in the excess of his love: "Holy angels, remain without, and leave me alone with Jesus." The length of time spent in celebrating was measured only by his love, and sometimes extended over two or three hours. His tears were so abundant and continuous that the corporals and cloths were usually soaked by them. The ardour of his heart shone in his face, but in addition to this clear indication, God was sometimes pleased to grant extraordinary signs. One morning, when celebrating Mass, a holy penitent, Doña Sancia Carrillo, saw sparks of fire issue from his mouth at the *Dominus vobiscum*. The Licentiate, Alfonso Fernandez, being present in Montilla at the Holy Sacrifice offered by Father Avila, beheld, to his great surprise, a globe of living fire descend upon him. On another occasion, during the same function, his head was seen encircled with rays of great brilliance. Notwithstanding all this, he never considered that he was sufficiently prepared to present himself at the altar, or had the purity necessary for such a holy ministry; so dissatisfied was he with himself that he used from time to time to say to his disciples: "Wretched that I am, would that I could even once say Mass well; and when I have received our Lord within me, I would not open my mouth." This truth will be better understood from the next chapter, which will treat of his high estimate of the sacerdotal dignity, and how much he effected for the training of perfect priests.

During the last years of his life, when he was oppressed with habitual infirmities, he could find no greater relief under his sufferings than to write upon the Blessed Sacrament, declaring that, had he spent

his whole life in doing this, matter would never have failed him. He did, in fact, write, in addition to many letters, one whole volume divided into twenty-seven treatises, full of truly heavenly doctrine. His great trial, amidst the sufferings of old age, was his inability to celebrate holy Mass, or to receive Holy Communion, by reason of his weakness, which compelled him to take refreshment two or three times before dawn. Our Lord, however, moved with pity for His servant, consoled him in this matter by putting it into the head of Alfonso Salmeron, of the Society of Jesus, one of the first companions of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and a famous interpreter of Holy Scripture, to request for him, in 1558, from Pope Paul IV., the favour of leave to celebrate for himself, or to receive from the hand of another, Holy Communion immediately after midnight. The Pontiff, in consideration of his signal merits in the works which he had done for the Catholic Church, graciously acceded to the request; and this availed, more than any other remedy, to alleviate the severity of the holy man's sufferings.

From his own vehement affection for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, can easily be inferred his ardent longing to increase this devotion in others, and to spread it as widely as possible. During the forty-six years of his apostolical preaching, he never ceased to magnify, either through his own efforts, or those of his disciples, the greatness of the Blessed Eucharist, using every art in the pulpit, and outside it, in public and private, to instil into others a high esteem and love for so ineffable a Mystery. Above every other pious exercise, he recommended to each one frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, proceeding in person to an audience with so courteous a Monarch, who with open door invites all and waits to listen to our needs, and to bestow upon us His graces. When the Blessed

Sacrament was exposed for public veneration, it was his desire that this should be done with as much magnificence as possible, and if we may use the expression, with luxury; such splendour being calculated to impress upon the populace, who understand little beyond what they can see, greater respect and esteem for that Sovereign Majesty.

His chief care, however, as considered by him a matter of the greatest importance, because it concerned the defence of the honour of Jesus Christ then so grievously outraged, was the restoration of the solemn feast of Corpus Domini to its former lustre of holy and devout observance; with its accustomed processions upon the day itself and throughout the octave. This feast, having been instituted by the Church with the holiest intentions, had in process of time been profaned in those parts through the wickedness of men by idle shows, improper dances, bull-fights, and every kind of sin and public scandal. God Himself suggested this to His servant in the following vision. Upon the Feast of Corpus Domini, Father Avila, in order to keep the day with greater recollection and privacy, left Granada, and was proceeding to the neighbouring monastery of the Carthusians. When mid-way, Jesus Christ appeared to him, sad and afflicted, having His Head crowned with thorns, and bearing a heavy cross upon His shoulder, while blood poured from all His Body. Amazed at the sight, the man of God threw himself at His feet, shedding bitter tears, and crying, "Lord, what is this, why dost Thou appear thus vested and thus strangely adorned, upon a day of such gladness to Thee?" "Why not," replied the suffering Redeemer, "when Christians treat Me thus in these days." Then at once He vanished, leaving His servant with this sharp thorn in his heart. The holy man grieved over so terrible an abuse, and determined

henceforth to remedy the evil even at the cost of his blood and life.

His efforts for this purpose were almost incredible. Upon the approach of the Feast he occupied himself in warning, preaching, and impressing upon his hearers the indispensable obligation incumbent upon all Christians of celebrating it with an interior spirit of devotion, and a modest and composed exterior; this being due to the respect we owe to the Man-God really present in the Blessed Sacrament. Gratitude to so great a Benefactor demands it, seeing that He has given Himself wholly for us, and this excess of love must be repaid by a corresponding love. As to the processions, he said, the intention of the Church in instituting them, was to offer Jesus Christ some compensation by our homage for the outrages which He suffered in the streets of Jerusalem during His bitter Passion, and at the same time induce Him to bless our houses in passing, and to fill them with His graces. Then, his countenance all inflamed with holy anger, he proceeded to condemn in the severest terms the abominable shamelessness of those who, before the very eyes of His Sovereign Majesty, and in the very act of paying homage to Him, instead of rendering Him true honour and worship, do really dishonour and insult Him, both from the balconies and along the streets, by their worldly attire and scandalous nudity, their lascivious and profane dances, and by every other kind of shameful dissoluteness. It was wonderful to see, especially towards the end of his life, a man so weak and unable to bear up at all during the rest of the year, yet regain his strength and healthy colour at the approach of that feast, and declaim daily for several hours throughout the octave, with such force, that sparks of fire were sometimes seen to issue from his mouth. At the conclusion of the feast, he was again laid prostrate

with weakness, and racked with pain, as though this short respite had been granted him simply in order that he might give vent to his love for this Mystery so dear to his heart.

As all that he could say or do failed to purge the functions of this holy season from the objectionable dances and entertainments which amused and excited the people, and were keenly supported by them, he next had recourse to the bishops and magistrates, from whom he sometimes met with little sympathy and much contradiction; but he was ever ready to expose even his life to danger, provided only the Divine honour was safe. Still, a single sermon of his was often more than sufficient to restore order, however ill-disposed the audience might be, as was notably the case in Montilla one day during the octave. Upon the conclusion of Vespers in the principal church, the town was already in commotion, waiting for the beginning of the procession, when the Vicar said, turning to the holy man who was present: "Father Avila, the only thing which remains to be done is for your Reverence to give the people a good exhortation how they ought to behave in accompanying our Lord." The holy man ascended the pulpit, and though wholly unprepared, spoke of that Mystery in words so sublime and full of such thrilling earnestness, that the large audience, seized with sudden compunction, burst into tears, and then passed out to accompany the Blessed Sacrament, with a contrition and recollection which would well have become a penitential procession.

In order to add a more joyful character to this devotion, he caused the hymns used by the Church in honour of the Blessed Sacrament, such as the *Pange Lingua*, the *Sacris Solemniis*, and others, to be translated into Castilian, and directed them to be sung in the procession by choirs of children dressed as angels, so

that while their senses were gratified, the minds of the people were raised to the perception and love of that ineffable Mystery.

He awakened a like zeal in almost all the prelates of Spain by the letters which he wrote, laying before them, with all authority and force of reason, under what strict obligation they were, and how great was the merit they would obtain before God, if they could abolish the many profanities from the holy processions, and thus prevent the committing of such a number of sins. And indeed God blessed with happy results the pious intentions and labours of His servant. On account of the esteem in which he was held by all, his representations had such weight that the bishops left no means of supporting him untried, and the holy man had the satisfaction of beholding the change effected throughout whole dioceses, and thus a considerable part of Spain acknowledges itself indebted to him for that fervour of devotion which was afterwards manifested.

In order to increase in the clergy, and especially amongst priests, a love and esteem for this Divine Food of Life, he wrote to the highest ecclesiastics, requesting their leave that the Office of the Blessed Sacrament should be recited upon every Thursday, when there was no impediment. To his care and zeal is principally owing the re-establishment in those parts of the frequentation of the sacraments, which had been almost abandoned for a great length of time. He never lost an opportunity of inculcating the propriety of frequently receiving this Divine Food, and the rich blessings which the soul desires therefrom. Although some of the bishops, and other persons of note, opposed him in this, as a novelty, and not to be allowed in the relaxation of habits which then prevailed, yet he never desisted from his purpose both by writing and by word,

urging with very learned arguments the justness of his claims, and stating that the Church possessed no other means more opportune and efficacious than these for the reform of manners.

His eagerness, however, was never wanting in discretion, as is expressly stated by that great spiritual master, Father Luis of Granada, and also appears clearly from various letters of Father Avila himself, which, besides detailing the various delusions which readily mix themselves up with this matter, prescribe rules of highest prudence concerning the more or less frequent use of this Heavenly Bread. He also inculcated, in the pulpit and elsewhere, frequent reception of Holy Communion, according to the intention of Jesus Christ and the ancient practice of the Church, supported by the Councils of the Fathers. Yet he never omitted to instruct the people at the same time concerning the dispositions necessary for approaching the holy altar. "It seems to me," he says in one of his letters to a preacher, "that no one should fix a precise limit as regards the partaking of this Heavenly Food, since, looking at the thing in itself, it is well to receive It daily, if a person be daily prepared to receive It. The whole point lies in securing that no mistake exists as to the preparation; or that a person imagines he is sufficiently prepared when he is not." And again: "Those are mistaken, who imagine that it suffices to have a languid desire to communicate, founded rather on the habit which they have formed than on any other motive. The fault consists in not having regard to the profit received from Holy Communion, which is the true sign of a good Communion."

To another director of souls he writes: "I exhort you not to admit the reception of this Divine Food so readily, but have regard to the state of the conscience of each one and dispense it accordingly. Warn them

that if this banquet is a pleasure to them, it must cost them something, and that is amendment of life; that if they are living carelessly, they do not deserve to taste this Food, which is prepared only for those who strive to resist their passions and to mortify their self-will. The words of the Apostle concerning material bread, being still more applicable to this Spiritual Food: 'If any man will not work, neither let him eat.'"[1]

Again, in another letter to a preacher, speaking of those under his spiritual direction, he advises: "Do not give them a loose rein, to communicate as often as they please, for many people communicate lightly, and not out of true reverence and devotion; such persons derive no profit from Communion. Keep them in a profound humility; cause them to desire this Heavenly Bread, and to feel themselves most unworthy of it. Let them learn that, in payment for this Food, they must render to God some service, either in repressing some passion each day, or in performing some other act to correspond with each Communion."

In one of the above mentioned letters he remarks: "There are some who, though they do not appear to profit by Communion, draw from it this amount of good, they do not turn back, nor relapse into the faults which they are wont to fall into when they do not communicate. For such men, frequent Communion is beneficial, since it is no slight gain to diminish the number of falls. Others there are, who, though they neither advance in virtue, nor avoid sins, do not cease to communicate frequently. You should inculcate upon the latter, what a dreadful thing it is to take this Divine fire into their breast, and not to burn; to taste this Heavenly Manna, and not relish Its sweetness; to make use of this powerful medicine, and yet remain sick. You should

[1] 2 Thess. iii. 10.

deprive them of it, as idle persons, in order that, grieved at seeing themselves deprived of so great a good, they may learn to value it, and dispose themselves for it by more suitable preparation, such as mortification, &c." Thus does he speak and write in all his works.

Lastly, so deep was his love for this adorable Mystery, that he chose it as his particular device and armorial bearings, sealing his letters with the impression of it. Thus ingenious is love in seeking out fresh inventions to add fuel to its flame.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS HIGH ESTEEM FOR THE SACERDOTAL DIGNITY, AND HIS GREAT LABOURS FOR THE TRAINING OF PERFECT PRIESTS.

FROM the description which has been given of Father Avila's tender devotion to the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, and of the extraordinary reverence with which he offered the Holy Sacrifice, may be inferred his high esteem for the dignity of the Christian priesthood; but we must now give some account of his laborious efforts for the training of perfect priests.

He used to call priests, *shrines of God*, and *mediators of peace between heaven and earth*. He was amazed at himself, for ever having been bold enough to accept this dignity, the befitting maintenance of which requires a purity of heart little short of the angelical. Hence came his constant dissatisfaction with himself and with the tenour of his life, although it was so perfect, for he regarded himself as a sacred vessel devoted to the service of the sanctuary, which therefore could not be profaned without very grave sacrilege. The earnest endeavours which he made to advance daily in holy virtue and in the path of perfection, were in him no arbitrary fancy or work of supererogation, but of the most strict obligation and indispensable to his character, so that he could not omit them without being faithless to it.

He always endeavoured to instil this esteem and

respect into those who were already priests, or who aspired to that office, reminding them of their high dignity, surpassing that of any temporal monarch, and of the strict obligation under which they lay, to lead a life corresponding with their holy state. Having been consulted by a young man as to his embracing the priestly office, he wrote a long letter, exhorting him to abandon a project, "too perilous to the soul," as he describes it, "since it is given to so few to acquire the perfection requisite for that dignity. And," he adds, "believe me, dear brother, it is the devil himself who in our days has led some into such pride and presumption, as to endeavour to obtain for themselves thus boldly so great a dignity, in order that, having raised them by this path to the loftiest pinnacles of the temple, he may all the more easily cast them down."

To another, who asked his advice upon this subject, he writes in similar terms: "Oh! if you only knew, dear brother, what a priest ought to be, and how strict an account he will have to render to God on quitting this life! Words cannot express the high perfection requisite for the exercise of the office of opening and shutting Heaven with the tongue, and of causing, at a sign from it, the Creator of all things to descend to earth. Many take upon themselves this office in order to obtain a maintenance. Oh! grievous abuse! To offer Sacrifice in order to eat! To make Heaven serve earth, and employ the Food of the soul to satisfy the body."

A single Mass to be answered for by any priest at the Divine tribunal, was, in his opinion, a terrible charge. A priest of rare probity had died in Baeza, and had ordered, by will, that a great number of Masses should be said for his soul. Upon hearing this, the Bishop of Jaen took counsel of Father Avila whether, considering the holy life of the deceased, it would not be more suitable to divide the money destined for that purpose

amongst the poor, of whom there was a large number in great need. After imploring light from Heaven, and taking due time for mature consideration, the holy man gave it as his opinion that the Masses ought to be said, giving as a reason the fact that the deceased man was a priest, who would therefore have a large account to render to eternal justice.

Another priest named Laurence Garcia, died in Montilla, with a great reputation for sanctity. The news was brought in these terms to Father Avila, who had been acquainted with him: "Be it known to your Reverence that good Laurence Garcia has ceased to live, and that it is exactly a year to-day since he said his first Mass." "What?" he replied, with an air of wonder, "Garcia has been a priest a whole year? Serious indeed is the account which he will have to render to God! Let us go to pray for his soul, and entreat the Divine Majesty to give us grace, that we may render a good account of the many years that we have unworthily borne this character." So saying, he withdrew in order to pray.

For this reason, when he felt that he was dying, Father Avila being asked by the Marchioness of Priego whether he stood in need of anything, replied, filled with holy fear at the thought of the many years of his priesthood: "Madam, I am in deep need of Masses, and if you wish to do me a charity, have many said for me and quickly." This sentiment, coming from the mouth and from the heart of a man so holy and so rich in merits, may well strike terror into many priests who, with the same obligations as Father Avila, lead a life the direct opposite to his.

He neither spoke, nor wrote to any priest, without inculcating as efficaciously as possible, the necessity of serious preparation for such a tremendous Sacrifice. "The first rule to be observed," he writes to one, "is

to recall to mind upon waking in the morning, the words: *Ecce Sponsus venit, exite obviam ei.* As one about to entertain a friend is busied therewith, especially if it be a high personage; how much more reasonable it is that the thought of receiving the great God, before whom even the angels in Paradise tremble, should occupy all your thoughts and cares. Be amazed that so filthy a worm should be admitted to this close intercourse, and receive his God within him. Ask Him, who has induced Him to descend into the hands of so grievous a sinner, and caused Him to enter a stable more mean and sordid than that of Bethlehem. Remember St. Peter, who did not deem himself worthy to be in the same ship as his Lord, and the Centurion in the Gospel, who did not dare to aspire to receive Him into his house. Consider how much this act resembles that of the Eternal Father, when He sent His Divine Son upon earth to become Man, and to take human flesh in the chaste womb of Mary." After various other considerations, he adds, "Call to mind particularly the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, and inform Him of your gratitude for a blessing which infinitely surpasses your deserts. Show Him all your weaknesses and passions, as a sick person displays his wounds to a physician in order to obtain a remedy. Offer to the Eternal Father His Divine Son, as a victim of propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Ask Him for a knowledge of yourself, and for a spark of that ineffable charity with which His Divine Son gave Himself to us, with all His infinite treasures. Have recourse to the great Mother of God, beseeching her, by the joy which she had in the Divine Incarnation, to obtain for you the grace to treat her Son well, who is shortly to descend into your hands."

To another priest he writes thus: "The first thing to be remembered is, that the Lord with whom we have

to deal, is both God and Man. Engrave these words deeply upon your heart: I am about to cause Jesus Christ to descend from Heaven, and to receive Him within my breast . . . Who would not burn with love, if he were to consider the great blessing which he is about to receive? Who would not tremble with awe before Him, in presence of whom the heavenly powers tremble? Who would not trust, when he holds in his hands such a pledge? O God, what ought to be the sentiments of one, having in his hands and in his breast Him whom the great Mother of God conceived in her womb? Compare yourself with our Lady, and the greeting she gave Him with your treatment of Him, and be confounded."

In speaking afterwards of the suitable employment of the time after the conclusion of the Holy Sacrifice, he says: "Listen to the Divine Guest, who says to you: *Scitis quid fecerim vobis?* Oh, if you ever attained to the knowledge of what our Lord has done for you during Mass! If any one could but taste Him with the palate of the soul! if one had a just balance wherein to weigh His merits! how blessed he would be even here on earth! and the sight of all earthly things would be to him but weariness and annoyance." This and much more is contained in his letters, and in his two treatises upon the great dignity of the priesthood—teaching, which may be called a distillation of heavenly wisdom, and has availed for the amendment of many priests, and for the sanctification of large numbers of the clergy.

Besides this inward fervour of spirit, with no less earnestness did he inculcate upon priests exterior decorum in their whole style and behaviour; and when he happened to see any of them profane that Most Holy Mystery by irreverence, it brought tears into his eyes. Having chanced to observe one morning that a priest in celebrating Mass, made the sign of the Cross too rapidly

over the Sacred Host, he could not contain himself, but approaching him quietly, as if to arrange a candle, he said to him, "My brother, treat Him well, for He is the Son of the good Father." At the end of Mass, having taken the priest apart, he gently admonished him to bear himself towards those Most Holy Mysteries more reverentially; and the other, having taken this humble and discreet correction in good part, expressed his sorrow, and promised immediate and sincere amendment.

Having these principles so much at heart and convinced of their importance, he made the sanctification of the priests his chief care wherever he went to exercise the apostolic ministry. He gave them special instructions daily, held lengthy spiritual conferences with them, exhorted them to be men of prayer, well skilled in all holy doctrine, and urged them to excite within themselves an ardent desire to save souls. He would often remark on this subject: "How few are the pious mothers who, in imitation of the widow of Nain, weep for their dead sons."

The Servant of God employed even greater care in perfecting such priests as, having once become his disciples, never abandoned his teaching. It will be enough to say that these made such progress in virtue and zeal, that he did not hesitate to admit them to a share in his apostolate. Upon hearing in Cordova, that various populations in remote parts, and especially in the Moorish hills, were living, for want of priests, in complete ignorance of the Divine mysteries, and, as a natural consequence of decay of faith, had abandoned themselves to every vice; he chose out of his disciples twenty-four of the most prudent and fervent priests, and sent them forth two by two, barefoot, badly clothed, and without any worldly provision, like the Apostles, that they might sanctify those lost districts.

They did not return until they had spent many weeks in traversing vast tracts of country, bringing numberless sinners to penance, and together with faith, causing piety and good manners also to flourish again. The harvest was so abundant, that the fame of it was published throughout Spain.

CHAPTER V.

HIS DEEP HUMILITY, AND THE OTHER VIRTUES CONNECTED WITH IT.

To dazzle others by the splendour of glorious actions, and not to be in some degree dazzled oneself; to extort from others expressions of honour and esteem, and to deem oneself worthy of nothing but contempt; to be reputed a saint by all, yet to consider oneself a grievous sinner: this is, in the opinion of St. Bernard, a humility as heroic and sublime as it is rare and difficult to practise. The humility of the holy Master John of Avila was of this character, it was dearer to him than any other virtue, and he flattered himself that by it, as by a thick veil, he could hide from the world the rich gifts with which he was so fully adorned. But he was mistaken, for it was precisely this virtue which, as a background does to gold, brought out his other virtues into greater relief and shed a stronger light upon them.

We have already said something of the high esteem in which he was held throughout Europe. He was reputed one of the most eminently holy men which the Church possessed in those days; he was listened to with admiration from the pulpit as another St. Paul, consulted as an oracle by the most renowned theologians, by magistrates, bishops, monarchs, and even by the Vicars of Jesus Christ, and called by common consent the Apostle of Spain; yet he thought so

humbly of himself, that he considered himself the vilest object in the world, and in truth marvelled how God could have tolerated him so long upon the earth, seeing that he was so hateful an object in himself. The honours which he received only served to render him more deeply ashamed and to place him in a state of consternation. Philip II. having nominated him to the bishopric of Segovia, and afterwards to the archbishopric of Granada, and Pope Paul IV. having offered to raise him to the purple, he not only refused these brilliant offers with invincible fortitude, but, horrified at himself, often repeated: "A fine thing this is. What a consummate hypocrite I must be to succeed in deceiving all: if they knew what I really am, instead of seeking me, they would flee from me." Actuated by the same mean opinion of himself, he refused an invitation to the Court given him by King Philip II., who desired to avail himself of his counsel, concealing his humility beneath the plea of those habitual infirmities, which were so dear to him on that very account.

Was there, on the other hand, some affront or humiliation to be endured, as when certain wicked men iniquitously calumniated him before the tribunal of the Inquisition, or when he was often insolently assailed and severely beaten, so far from resenting it, or seeking compensation, his heart was filled with joy, and he used to say: "Now they recognize me for what I am and treat me as I deserve." In order to confirm others in this opinion he was wont to remark: "What great mercy God has shown towards me, in causing me to be born of humble parentage; otherwise who could have borne with me?" When asked to assist criminals condemned to die by the hand of justice, he replied: "Let us go to see what we also should have been, had not God's restraining hand held us in the beginning." From this profound humility proceeded those fears for his

everlasting salvation, which often, and especially towards the close of his life, distressed his heart, and suggested to him in this extremity sentiments befitting the holy man that he was. "Ah, dear Father," he would say, all trembling and full of confusion, "if you care for my soul, suggest to me those acts which you are accustomed to suggest to those who are about to be executed, for of such I too have sore need."

All the inclination of his heart, or to speak more truly, the one great aim of his humility, was to instruct children, and the commonest workmen in the squares, and in country places the roughest and most neglected peasants. The hospitals also, and the prisons, were to him gardens of delight, the cultivation of which was all the dearer to him, because it involved the whole burden of the apostolate without any of its honour. When obliged to engage in matters of greater distinction, and to deal with persons in high places, he did this with the utmost ardour, persuaded that this was God's will for him, yet it cost him a great effort, and did painful violence to his humility.

In his frequent visits to the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Montilla, though aged, and far advanced in perfection, it was his delight to converse on holy subjects with the young novices, protesting that he derived no little profit thereby for his soul.

Like holy Job, he feared at his every act, however trifling; and never performed any without a previous strict examination, saying that the time is well spent which a person devotes to knowing and rebuking himself, and that we never walk more securely in God's way, than when we are most dissatisfied with self.

From this absence of self-esteem sprang that entire dependence upon the Roman Pontiff, and all other Superiors, whom he considered himself bound to serve, not moving a step, unless he had received an express

command from them. This was the ruling principle of his conduct, and his truest comfort under all circumstances, however untoward they might be: "Because," as he said, "things are better thus, even for self-love, for it spares me the trouble of seeking means to please God; one incurs fewer risks, one labours with more merit, and one goes to Heaven carried upward, as it were, by the chariot of obedience."

This same humility induced the holy man to deprive himself of all that he could hope for in this world. Not content with having distributed his patrimony to the poor, when he commenced his apostolic work, retaining for himself merely two simple suits of clothes and a few books; he would never allow himself to be treated otherwise than in accordance with his poverty, refusing lucrative canonries, rich prebends, and generous donations. Many rich persons gave him large sums of money to be disposed of as he chose, and he used always to answer: "I will be your almoner, for as to myself, I seek your souls, and not your possessions." The whole of what he received went in relief of the indigent.

His food, clothing, and dwelling, were at all times and in every case similar to those of the poor. His table was supplied with bread, raw and ill-seasoned herbs, and a little fruit. When, upon grand occasions, he treated himself somewhat more liberally, a little milk was added, but never anything cooked by fire. Although he valued cleanliness in dress, and used to say that health and civilization walk hand in hand; his clothes were generally worn and ragged, so that they scarcely hung together. When urged to replace them, he answered, jokingly: "I cannot do so, they have served me so well hitherto, that I have not the heart to discard them." Neither did the stratagems of the Marchioness of Priego and the Archbishop of Granada, Don Pedro

Guerraro, avail, who, having detained him all night in their palace, under some pretext, had them secretly changed for new ones. He no sooner perceived this loving device than he wept and entreated so earnestly, that he obtained the restitution of his old ones.

When invited by Archbishops and Bishops and by the lords of Priego to preach in the towns and districts under their jurisdiction, he would never accept their pressing invitations to lodge in their palaces, but contented himself with a small house contiguous to theirs, in company with some good priest. Wherever he lodged the furniture of his apartment consisted of a poor bed, a crucifix, a table, a chair, and little else. It always remained imprinted on his memory, that Jesus Christ lived and died poor, and, six years before his death, he stripped himself of the few things which he possessed, handing them over, by written donation, to one of his disciples.

To his deep humility must also be attributed his constantly severe treatment of himself, as long as health and strength permitted. He used to call humility and penance sister virtues, which gladly go hand in hand, it being the office of the former to detect faults and of the latter to punish them. Hence, although during the whole course of his life, the holy man had preserved untarnished the beautiful flower of his virginal purity, and is not known to have ever lost his baptismal innocence; nevertheless, convinced, in his humility, that he was a great sinner, and taking no account of the arduous and unceasing labours indispensably connected with his ministry and the severe sufferings which he frequently endured, together with the bitter persecutions excited against him by men and devils; he used his body so harshly as to arouse compassion and cause a holy envy in the most fervent penitents.

Throughout the whole course of his apostolate he

never tasted meat, except when sick: during Lent, and at other times when engaged in preaching, he would not grant this indulgence to his infirmities, being convinced that to eat meat himself, ill accords with preaching abstinence to others. His underclothing consisted of rough hair-cloth, which enveloped the whole body: he took the discipline daily, so as to draw blood. He fasted rigorously upon all Thursdays and Fridays, and in addition used a bed made of a heap of dry twigs spread upon the bare ground; he adopted various other extraordinary mortifications which the ingenuity of his charity invented from time to time, being anxious to offer to God some reparation for the grievous outrages which He continually received from men.

Yet it must not be imagined that this humility and perfect absence of self-esteem rendered the holy man either backward in acting or less resolute in encountering any danger, when the honour of God and his neighbours' good required it. As our whole activity in doing good proceeds from grace, which God dispenses in greater abundance to the humble, so in proportion as he plunged more deeply into the knowledge of his own nothingness, he experienced an increase in mental vigour, which rendered him indefatigable and greedy of further toil, exclaiming with His beloved Apostle St. Paul: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me."[1]

Hence, though his body was exhausted and consumed by those habitual infirmities which were a long martyrdom, and by his own harsh treatment of it, nevertheless he obliged it to conquer its sufferings and further the holy designs of his fervent spirit, so that he alone effected more than ten other labourers would have done. Constrained to endure all kinds of contradictions, from men and from devils, despised, calumniated,

[1] Philipp. iv. 13.

and beaten, he never hesitated nor lost courage, nor ever yielded an inch, but gaining ground, as it were, step by step, made steady advance, until he routed his enemies and remained master of the field.

CHAPTER VI.

HE SUFFERS FROM CONSTANT SICKNESS DURING THE LAST SEVENTEEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE. HIS HOLY DEATH. THE HIGH ESTEEM IN WHICH HE WAS HELD BY THE BEST MEN OF HIS TIME.

ALTHOUGH our self-love inclines us to regard corporal infirmities as a heavy burden attached to the blessing of life, a debt which is always paid unwillingly, and through constraint; not the less are they, especially to the friends of God, a precious gift by which He rewards their faithful service, purifies their spirit from every earthly affection, that it may become more enamoured with heavenly riches, and gives them therein abundant matter for practising every virtue, and weaving for themselves a richer crown of glory. Father Avila regarded in this light the many and painful diseases, by means of which his good God admitted him to a share of His cross.

His indefatigable mental application, the frequent mishaps in his journeys, his long and energetic preaching, and habitual ill-treatment of his body, in short the labours and exertions of an apostolate of more than twenty-five years, gradually reduced him to such a condition that, in spite of his vigorous spirit, his body was so weakened as to make it no exaggeration to call him during the last seventeen years of his life, *virum dolorum et scientem infirmitatem;* seeing that every part of him was racked with its own peculiar

torment. He suffered agonies from indigestion, had acute pains in the side, constant attacks of catarrh, great oppression in his chest, besides a discharge from the eyes so continuous and virulent as almost to deprive him of sight, while frequent returns of gout made havoc of his limbs. More trying to him, however, than any other pain, were the violent attacks of fever, during the height of which, lasting generally for six hours, he lost the use of his senses, and was incapable of anything except simple endurance.

Under this martyrdom of pain in every part, his heroic patience and tranquillity of mind were the admiration of all in Montilla, and of such as came to visit him. He never uttered a complaint, nor showed any irritation or weariness in his sufferings; and during all those years he never asked God to remove this heavy cross from him. With a countenance ever calm and cheerful, and with a heart tranquil and full of confidence, he kissed the hand that smote him, and accepted his sufferings as so many pledges of God's love. When his pains became more intense he would only exclaim: "Oh, my God, if it please Thee, strike, but hold me firmly, that I may not slip from Thy grasp: *Auge dolorem sed auge patientiam.*" One night, having been seized with acute spasms, which he feared he had not strength enough to endure, he asked God to mitigate them somewhat; and received such consolation from his loving Lord, as to obtain several hours' respite. But, reflecting upon this in the morning, he said to one of his disciples, "What a rebuff God gave me last night, He has shown me how weak I am, and unwilling to carry the cross."

To an inquiry as to his state of health, he once answered: "It is very bad, seeing how weak I am, for were it otherwise, God would not relieve me of my sufferings so speedily." A Religious having told him

one morning that he had had a bad night, he asked what had been the cause, and when the other replied that it was the acute pain which he had been suffering; "Ah, if that be so," said Father Avila, "your Reverence would speak more correctly, if you were to say that you had had an excellent night." On another occasion, when compassionated in his sufferings, on account of the loss to the public of the benefit of his preaching, "My dear sir," he remarked, "God is no less admirable in His dealing with an invalid chained to his bed, than He is with a preacher in the pulpit."

Whenever his sufferings allowed him a brief rest, he immediately resumed his labours, being always full of anxiety to benefit all, and to inflame all with the fire of Divine love. When it became generally known that the Servant of God was to preach that day, it was wonderful to observe the commotion in the whole city, one person inviting another to come and hear Father Avila, till in a few minutes the church was filled. He received all who came to him about their soul's interests, comforting each one with the same kindness and tenderness of heart as of old, without the slightest sign of weariness or annoyance. At the same time, he wrote or dictated a great number of letters to all classes of persons, full of heavenly wisdom and holy advice. Indeed many remarked that the letters which were dictated by him when sick had in them a singular force and spiritual unction.

In proportion as his illness rendered him daily more incapable of sanctifying others by his labours, so much the more did he converse with God, spending almost the whole night and day in sweet intercourse with Him. Having almost reached the age of seventy, and the house of his body being already in ruins, through the shocks which it had undergone, he thought only of his imminent journey to the house of eternity. His

thoughts, desires, and conversation, were all of that blessed land, of the glory of the saints, and of the unspeakable felicity which they enjoy in beholding with open face their highest good; the bitterness of his present pains he sweetened with the sure hope of speedily sharing in their joy.

He was not disappointed, for, at the commencement of the year 1569, his strength was so sensibly diminished, that it was clearly seen he had only a short time to live. New maladies were added to his former ones, including extreme pain in the liver and in the loins, which, spreading upwards, and increasing in violence, attacked the whole of the left side; God thus disposing, that, as he had lived upon the cross for so many years with His Divine Son, he should also die upon the cross with Him. He passed the whole of April in this state, as it were in a constant agony, ever dying, and yet not ceasing to live; but on the 8th of May there were evident indications that death was approaching. The physician having come to examine the progress of the disease, declared him to be dying, and said to him, "Father Avila, it is now time for friends to tell the truth. The good God wishes to have you, that He may give you the reward corresponding to your many merits." At this announcement, looking up into Heaven, and then fixing his eyes upon a picture of his dear Mother Mary, he poured forth his whole soul into the prayer, *Recordare, Virgo Mater, dum steteris in conspectu Dei, ut loquaris pro nobis bona.* He expressed a wish to make his confession immediately, and to receive the Holy Viaticum, begging them several times, with holy impatience, to bring him his Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

At the news of his dangerous state, the Marchioness of Priego, oppressed with grief for the great loss which was impending her, hastened to his house, to ensure by her authority and vigilance that nothing should be

wanting to him in his extremity. Thither came also, all the Fathers from the College of the Society, though it would be hard to say whether their object was to assist him in dying, or to learn from his example how precious is the death of the just. When his Lord entered his room, his heart went forth to meet Him, his strength seemed to revive, and he exclaimed, with a beaming countenance, "Come, come, Lord." Being asked by Father Villaras to say something for the instruction and edification of the bystanders before communicating, he replied: "What good thing can I say, except that this loving Lord has descended from Heaven to earth to be the remedy, salvation, and consolation of contrite sinners? I am one of these, and therefore I pray our Lord that out of charity He may be given to me." An answer which drew tears from all present.

Invigorated by the bread of the strong, and having gained strength for the journey he was about to make, he asked anxiously for Extreme Unction. When told that there was time enough, he said, "No, there is no time to lose: I wish to receive it while I am capable of seeing and hearing what is done and said in that holy function." Afterwards when asked by the Marchioness of Priego what his wishes were as regards his burial, he replied, *that he wished to be interred in the church of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, not being willing to be separated even in death, from those whom he had loved and esteemed so highly in life.*

One or other of the Fathers who stood round the bed of the dying man, suggested to him various ejaculations taken from the Holy Scripture, and other sentiments suitable for one of his holiness and learning. The Servant of God, entering into himself, with the deepest humility, implored them, with his hands clasped in act of entreaty: "Oh, my beloved Fathers, suggest to

me the acts which you are accustomed to suggest to those about to die by the hand of justice in punishment for their misdeeds." One of the Fathers replied: "Upon such occasions we remind them frequently of Divine mercy, and exhort them to trust in the merits of Jesus Christ." "Oh," said the dying man, "Speak to me a great deal of that."

Having been asked by the same Father whether his conscience was at peace, he replied: "For whom has God made Heaven, if not for penitent sinners?" "But, your Reverence," rejoined the Father Rector, "must now draw great consolation from all the good that you have done for God's glory, and for the salvation of souls." "Anything but consolation," replied the humble Servant of God, "I experience instead a grievous fear which is justly caused me by my sins." That he felt this truly in his own heart was evident, when, being asked by the Marchioness of Priego whether he needed anything, he said, "Madam, out of your charity, when I am dead have many Masses said for me, and quickly."

Yet this fear in no wise diminished the firm conviction which he always had, that he should go to behold God speedily. It was indeed this hope which ever encouraged him to endure joyfully his long and acute sufferings, so that as they daily became more severe, he used to say: "Oh, my God, it is well thus." When he was almost in his agony, Father Villaras prepared to offer the Holy Sacrifice in order to obtain from God especial strength and help for him during the last decisive battle of life. Having been asked what Mass he would prefer to be said, he named without hesitation the votive Mass for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that being the foundation of all his hopes.

Before entering upon the final struggle, he showed some signs of inward perturbation, during which,

without speaking, he kept his eyes immovably fixed upon an *Ecce Homo*. Then, quickly regaining his serenity, he said, "Thank God, I have no further trouble now." The last recommendation of the soul being made in the accustomed prayers of the Church, he responded with a loud and clear voice; taking his crucifix in his hand, he pressed it tenderly to his breast, exclaiming several times: "My God, I commit my soul to Thee, which Thou hast redeemed with Thy Most Precious Blood." After these words, invoking with his dying breath the names of Jesus and Mary, amidst the tears of all around him, on the 10th of May, 1569, in the seventieth year of his age, and nearly the forty-fifth of his apostolate, he ended his holy life, *in osculo Domini*.

No sooner was the death of the Servant of God publicly known, than the whole town was in mourning as though for some unexpected general calamity. Persons recounted to each other the signal benefits received from him, and all deplored the irreparable loss which they had sustained. The people hastened to the house of the deceased, to have at least the satisfaction of beholding him once more, of kissing his hand, and of carrying away some small article belonging to him, to be retained as a precious relic. For this object, they would even have ransacked his poor house, if the magistrates had not made timely provision by setting up strong barriers and placing an armed guard.

The bearing of his venerated body to the church of the Society of Jesus, accompanied by a procession of the whole clergy, secular and regular, wore the appearance of a solemn triumph. So great was the concourse of citizens, and visitors from the neighbouring districts, that it was necessary to halt several times, and force open a passage through the crowd on the way to the church. At the conclusion of the obsequies, the body having been enclosed in a coffin, was placed in a

niche formed for it in the side wall of the principal chapel, belonging to the lords of the domain. An inscription in praise of the deceased Father was placed above it, and so remained for several years: until it was transferred to a more precious urn of red jaspar, made expressly, at the expense of Don Mateo Vasquez Leca, Archdeacon of Carmona, Canon of Seville, who was devoted to the Servant of God, and who highly esteemed his virtues.

But the demonstrations of esteem in honour of Father Avila did not end here. The room in which he died soon came to be held in such veneration that it was frequented by the devout almost like a public sanctuary. St. Francis Borgia, who was then in Spain, would enter it only upon his knees, and was never tired of kissing the walls which had sheltered so holy a man. His tomb, in like manner, became the most valued treasure of Montilla, and a spot whence graces were dispensed most abundantly to those who sought them. His clothes, hair, letters, signatures, portraits, and whatever else had belonged to him, were eagerly sought and jealously preserved, not only by the common people, but by princes, prelates, and monarchs.

Whilst men were paying these honours to the body of the Servant of God upon earth, our Lord was pleased to proclaim in various ways the glory which that grand soul was enjoying in Heaven. Doña Agnes de Hozes, a Religious of great virtue in Cordova, and favoured by God with extraordinary graces, to whom Father Avila had written many letters, was anxious to know whether her holy director had gone straight to Heaven without being detained in Purgatory, as she felt persuaded that he had. There suddenly appeared to her a beautiful youth, surrounded by dazzling light, who, after uttering the words: "How could it be otherwise with him?" at once vanished. On another

occasion, after his death, the same nun, when in her cell, saw Father Avila pass before her in his priestly vestments, and heard him say, as he turned towards her: "Sister, remember that you also will have some day to take the same journey."

The Servant of God appeared one day to Mother Constance of Avila, a nun far advanced in the path of perfection, when she was agitated by a strong temptation to doubt of the immortality of the soul, and encouraged her with the words: "Know, that I enjoy, through Divine mercy, a share in the glory of Heaven. You also will die at the time decreed, and we shall meet in Paradise." Nor was this the only visit with which the holy man favoured her; for he twice returned to thank her for having, out of regard to him, redeemed at her own expense ten young girls who were groaning under the harsh slavery of the Moors.

In 1589, on the feast of the Apostle St. Matthew, the heavens were darkened over with clouds, and a furious tempest burst upon Montilla, turning day into night, so that the whole country seemed about to be submerged. In the general consternation, a barefooted friar began to adjure the clouds with the exorcisms prescribed by the Church; when suddenly there appeared as if mocking him, a number of demons, who cried out: "Why do you weary yourself? what are you afraid of? Montilla is strong enough, and well defended by walls." "No," replied the good Religious, "she is weak, and without walls." To which they made answer: "What wall is stronger than John of Avila, who is buried in the church of the Jesuits? Evil would it be for Montilla if it had not such a wall for its defence."

The esteem in which he was held by the chief personages of that time, may be gathered from the number who have written of him and of his heroic

deeds. The seraphic St. Teresa, the Carmelite, contrary to her wont, wept bitterly when the news of Master Avila's death was brought to her at Toledo, and being asked why she wept, since there was every reason to believe that the Servant of God was already in the glory of Heaven, she replied: "This I do not doubt, but what troubles me is, that the Church of God has lost a strong pillar, and many souls a powerful support; though living at a distance, I myself was under great obligations to him."

St. Thomas of Villanova, Archbishop of Valencia, declared that he knew no one, from the Apostles downwards, who had produced greater fruit in souls than Master John of Avila. So great a pattern of penance, and authority in mystical theology, as St. Peter of Alcantara, after conversing several times with Father Avila, declared that beyond a doubt all esteemed him singularly able and skilful in understanding and directing spiritual matters. St. Francis of Sales, a Bishop of eminent holiness and learning, in his *Practice of the Love of God*, calls him *the learned and saintly preacher of Andalusia*. St. Francis Borgia always spoke of him as the *great Master*. The opinion of St. Ignatius, and the expressions he used concerning him, have been already mentioned. The Pontiff, Paul III., in a Bull dated 1540, describes him as: *Virum sanctum, magistrum in theologia, et verbi Dei præconem insignem.*

The Venerable Father Luis of Granada, who has been so often quoted, when writing the Life of this great Servant of God, says that the virtues of this apostolic man were too high and sublime for our mental vision, and that to write of them as they deserved, one must turn one's eyes from common objects, and raise them to that band of renewed souls in whom, through great mortification of the flesh, the Spirit of God reigns supreme. Again, speaking as an eye-witness, he adds:

"I have observed in this Servant of God deep humility, ardent charity, unquenchable zeal for the salvation of souls, and constant diligence in winning them to God." Fra Diego de Yepes, Bishop of Tarragona, and confessor to King Philip II., in his Life of St. Teresa, describes Father Avila as "well known in our time to be an evangelical man, one of the most faithful and zealous ministers which the Church of God has produced for many centuries."

Lastly, we find that all the men illustrious for holiness and learning who flourished in his time, whether secular or religious, conferred with him either personally or in writing, concerning their spiritual state. King Philip II. invited him several times to the Court in order to obtain his advice: an honour which the humble Servant of God always refused, under the just pretext of ill-health. In short, there was no class of persons that did not profess the highest veneration for the holy man, and consider him, on account of his heroic virtues, most worthy to be raised by the Vatican to the honours of beatification.

Note.

The church of the Society in Montilla remains in its old state, except that, having passed into the hands of the Franciscans, it has been dedicated to their holy Patriarch, and the Jesuit Saints have been replaced by those of their own Order.

Shortly before their expulsion from Spain in the last century, the Jesuits had commenced and made some way in the erection of a finer church, and a College better adapted for teaching. Part of this building has now been converted into a theatre, and the remaining portion into an inn.

The house in Montilla which was so long the abode of Father Avila is still preserved, and in it is the small

chapel where he used to say Mass and hear confessions. It is now inhabited and taken care of by a chaplain, but certain alterations have been made in the room where the Father died.

The venerated remains of the Beatified, almost untouched, are placed in the principal chapel of the said church on the Gospel side, enclosed in a marble tomb, which is surmounted by a bust, also of marble, bearing on its front the two following inscriptions:

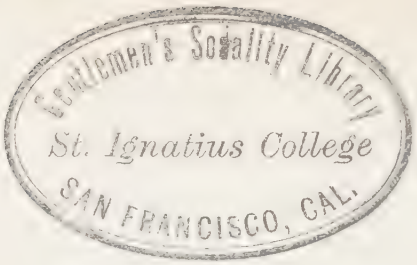
THIS TOMB CONTAINS THE BODY OF THE VENERABLE FATHER, MASTER JOHN OF AVILA, APOSTOLIC PREACHER OF ANDALUSIA. BORN JANUARY 6, 1500. DIED MAY 10, 1569, AGED 69.

TRANSFERRED TO THIS PLACE IN THE YEAR 1641.

MAGISTRO JOANNI ABYLÆ PATRI OPTIMO
VIRO INTEGERRIMO DEIQUE AMANTISSIMO
FILII EJUS IN CHRISTO P.
MAGNI ABYLÆ CINERES VENERABILIS OSSA MAGISTRI,
SALVETE EXTREMUM CONDITA AD USQUE DIEM.
SALVE, DIGNE PATER, PLENO CUI FLUMINE CŒLUM.
AFFLUXIT; LARGO CUI PLUIT IMBRE DEUS.
CŒLI RORE SATUR QUÆ MEUS TUA SEVERAT INTUS
MILLE DUPLO RETULIT FŒNORE PINGUIS AGER.
QUAS TAGUS AC BŒTIS QUAS SINGYLIS[1] ALLUIT ORAS
ORE TUO CHRISTUM BUCCINA PERSONUIT.
TE PATRII CIVES TE CONSULTURUS ADIBAT
ADVENA TU TERRIS NUMINIS INSTAR ERAS.
QUANTUM NITEBARIS HUMI REPTARE PUSILLUS
TANTUM PROVEXIT TE DEUS ASTRA SUPER.

JOANNES LECTORI.
ABYLA MI NOMEN: TERRA, HOSPITA: PATRIA CŒLUM.
QUÆRIS QUO FUNCTUS MUNERE? MESSOR ERAM.
VENERAT AD CANOS FALX INDEFESSA SENILES
QUÆ CHRISTO SEGETES MESSUIT INNUMERAS.

[1] Est fluvius Bœticae, vernaculo sermone, *Guadagenil,* ó *Guadajenil.*



CHAPTER VII.

HIS SUPERNATURAL GIFTS. MIRACULOUS FAVOURS GRANTED BY GOD TO THE INTERCESSION OF HIS SERVANT, BEFORE AND AFTER DEATH.

Though God, for His own good ends, has occasionally been pleased to bestow even upon His enemies some of those gifts which, inasmuch as they surpass the powers of nature, are called by theologians *gratiæ gratis datæ;* His intention usually is that these gifts should form part simply of the equipage, so to speak, of His servants, giving them all the more credit before the eyes of the world. Hence, the Church, so wary and so wise in her decisions, although convinced, after rigid examination, of their heroic virtues, does not hesitate to draw arguments from those gifts, as to whether or not the honours of the altar should be decreed to them.

Now in the bestowal of such great gifts as these our dear Lord was most liberal towards His faithful servant. At one time, as we are told, an angel was sent from Heaven to save his life; at another, he was seen clothed in dazzling light, and raised several handbreadths from the ground. It was granted to him to penetrate the most hidden secrets of the heart, and to foresee future events. On one occasion our Lord spoke to him through the lips of the Figure on the Cross, assuring him of the pardon of his sins; and once more Jesus appeared to him bearing the cross upon His shoulder and spoke familiarly to him. We

need only add, on this last point, a few other favours with which God was pleased to enrich him, together with certain miraculous graces conferred for his sake on such as had recourse to him in their necessities.

The district of Cordova had been afflicted for many months by a continuous drought, the sky was as bronze, and the heavens yielded not a drop of water; were this state of things to last much longer the whole harvest would be lost. In order to escape so great a calamity, the magistrates were advised to have recourse, by a fervent novena, to Mary, the great Mother of mercies and true consoler of the afflicted. As a means of rendering the act of general prayer more efficacious, Father Avila was asked to preach, and most efficiently did he do his part, urging with equal force and clearness that the calamity was a chastisement for sin, and that God would most certainly cease to scourge them if only they should cease to offend Him. The audience was seized with contrition, and with tears in their eyes, and heartfelt sorrow of heart, they begged audibly for mercy and pity; at which point the holy preacher paused, and then in words full of authority and tenderness, bade them take courage, and lay aside their fears, for that the harvest of this year would be abundant, and on that very day the longed for rain would come; this he said though at that moment the bright heavens above gave no indications of any change. The result proved him right; that same day it rained heavily, and continued doing so for several days. The fields were refreshed, and regaining their moisture, produced in good time a rich and abundant harvest, as the Servant of God had foretold.

Not less definite was the prophecy made by him to Don Pedro Perez, an ecclesiastic of no ordinary sanctity. The latter, having been offered the archdeaconry of Jaen, took counsel with Father Avila

before accepting it, and he, after listening to him quietly, said: "Accept it, for by that path God wishes to sanctify you; yet prepare yourself for the great trials that await you." In the five years during which Perez held that office, his trials were so many and grievous that in the end he was obliged to resign it in the hope of regaining his peace of mind.

Father Avila's next prediction was still more remarkable. Amongst those under his direction was James Perez, a young and newly ordained priest of rare talent, who, with his full approbation, had devoted himself to the apostolical ministry of preaching. Being curious, like many beginners, to hear those older and more experienced than himself, he went to Seville, where Dr. Constantine, an orator famed throughout Spain, was preaching in one of the principal churches. After listening to him, he was much pleased, and praised highly his sermon on the Passion of Jesus Christ, for its great fervour and impressiveness with the people. When, however, the sermon was concluded, he met the preacher returning home ostentatiously dressed in a silk habit and riding upon a richly caparisoned mule, followed by a large escort of pages and servants. So pretentious a retinue could not fail to excite wonder in one accustomed to have before his eyes only the extreme poverty and humble bearing of his master. This astonishment increased, when, having gone one day to visit the great preacher, he found his house richly furnished and hung with rare tapestry. Upon his return to Montilla, Perez informed Father Avila of what he had seen, adding that in his opinion it boded ill, and savoured more of the school of Luther, as his deeds did not correspond with his words. Father Avila replied, "You have hit the point, such is the case; but in a short time the world will be undeceived, and I ask you to call to mind then what I now say to

you." In effect, Constantine was shortly afterwards incarcerated by order of the Holy Inquisition, and, having been convicted of Lutheranism, received the punishment which he merited.

In Montilla, the Marchioness Doña Catalina, received letters telling her that her sister, the Duchess of Arcos, was dying. Deeply affected by the news, in the earnestness of her desire to see her sister while still alive, she insisted on setting out at once, giving no time for the necessary preparations to be made. Her servants, having in vain entreated her to wait a little, went to inform Father Avila, who came at once to calm and reassure her. "Your sister," he said, "will not die so speedily; you will find her alive, and not only will you be present at her death, but you will be able, by assisting her then, to give her full proof of your love." This prediction was verified, to the great surprise of all present.

While Master John of Avila, Father Luis of Granada, Don Diego de Guzman, and Doctor Loarte, were seated at table together, in the house of the Count of Feria, who at the time was unwell, the conversation happened to turn upon the sad havoc that heresy had made, and was still making, in the flourishing kingdom of France; and upon one of the guests exclaiming, "May God in His infinite mercy preserve our Spain from so great a calamity," Father Avila looked grave for a few moments, and then, suddenly striking his hand upon the table, appealed to those present: "Let us give heartfelt thanks to God, for it is His fixed will that heresy should not enter Spain." A prophecy which remained true for more than two centuries, although every other part of Europe was more or less contaminated.

Laden with years, and bowed down by habitual infirmities, the holy man used sometimes to walk,

leaning upon his staff, to the villa of the College of the Society of Jesus, in order to enjoy the air. Conversing one day with the Brother who was in charge of it, he asked him how he wished to love God. "Most tenderly," replied the Brother, "but I know not how to do so." "Well," continued Father Avila, "do you know, dear Brother, when you will love Him truly? It is when you shall endure being beaten by one of the youths belonging to this villa; and when, instead of resenting it, you defend him, and endeavour to assist him and do him good." This was not a matter of simple instruction, but of prophecy; for in a short time, one of these same youths, being enraged against the Brother, without cause, set hotly upon him and beat him. Justice was about to take its course and punish the delinquent severely, but his victim, remembering the words of the Servant of God, generously interposed in favour of the guilty man, and obtained his pardon, to the edification of all. By this act he merited from God the grace to love Him more and more perfectly ever after, till he died with the reputation of being a Religious of eminent virtue and singular holiness.

It was Father Avila's invariable custom never to admit others to conversation with him during the time that he spent alone with God in prayer, holding that the respect due to the Divine Majesty required he should not distract himself with other matters whilst in communion with Him. However, one morning, before retiring, he said, contrary to his usual habit, to Father Villaras: "If any one comes to ask for me whilst I am alone, inform me immediately." When an hour and a half had expired, a stranger arrived, and asked for him. Having been admitted, they held a long conference together, after which the stranger departed, saying as he left, in a voice of astonishment, to Father Villaras: "What a truly holy man and full of God your

Father Avila is! I have travelled the whole way from Rome for the express purpose of conferring with him, and he has told me things which were most certainly known only to God and to myself."

It often happened that when he had withdrawn to pray, persons came to speak to him, but in consequence of his order that none should be admitted, they were obliged to leave again. After his prayer was ended, he would call his attendant and bid him, "Go and take some particular answer to such a person;" and it was found to be precisely a solution of the question which that person had come to discuss.

A like thing occurred in the case of another stranger, who having come to Montilla to consult the holy man upon some affair of conscience, was told that Father Avila was in the act of preaching in the church. "Very well," he said, "I will go meanwhile to hear him and afterwards return." He listened to the sermon, but did not return, because, said he, "I need nothing further: the holy man has, by his discourse from the pulpit, as fully satisfied my desire as if he beheld my interior."

Father Stephen Centenaras, who belonged to a noble family, and had been page to King Ferdinand the Catholic, became afterwards a priest of consummate perfection and a very dear disciple of Father Avila. He had withdrawn, with the approbation of his holy director, to lead a solitary life in one of the mountains of the Sierra Morena, separating Andalusia from the rest of Spain. Having built a small hermitage there, he devoted himself to the contemplation of heavenly things, the administration of the sacraments, and the instruction of the poor inhabitants of those rugged mountains, who, destitute of all spiritual help, were leading the life of wild beasts rather than that of Christians. On a dark night, as chill and stormy as can well be imagined, a man came to the door of the

hermitage and asked Father Stephen to take, out of charity, the Holy Viaticum to a poor man who was dying. Centenaras was at first somewhat perplexed at this request, considering the circumstances of time and place and that the person was unknown to him; then, taking fresh confidence, he said: "Let us go in God's name;" and, carrying the Holy Eucharist, he set out. No sooner had he crossed the threshold, than he found two youths of pleasing aspect, with lighted torches in their hands, who accompanied him to the house of the sick man, and reconducted him in the same manner to his hermitage: upon reaching which they silently disappeared and were no more seen. Not comprehending the character of an incident so strange and inexplicable, Father Stephen was about to write very early next morning an account of it to Blessed Avila, when at that moment he received a letter from him which enlightened him on the point. "Brother," it said, "let not what occurred last night surprise you; for you may be assured that the two youths whom you saw were angels sent by God to strengthen you, and as a reward for your zeal. Return thanks to the Divine Mercy, and continue to love and serve Him faithfully."

That God, through the intercession, and for the merits of His Servant, performed during his life, and also after his death, many and great miracles, was the public opinion in Spain; but we here add the testimony of a few out of the many witnesses who made their depositions in the process of beatification.

The Licentiate Juan Ramirez de Mesa deposes upon oath, that, being in November, 1623, a student of the College of the Conception in Seville, while pursuing his studies he was attacked by a slow fever, which was accompanied by severe pains in the chest, a violent cough, a very tainted expectoration, and above all by such emaciation and loss of strength, that he could

neither move nor breathe without difficulty. Having consulted Professor Francis Ximenes, the most skilful and celebrated physician at that time in Seville, he was told, after a long study of all the unfavourable symptoms and an application of the usual remedies, that his case was one of confirmed phthisis, which had already reached so advanced a stage, that he could not count on three months longer life. Finding that he had nothing more to hope for from men, he sought the aid of the saints in Heaven; and addressed himself to Father Avila, because he had heard how dear he was to God, and entreated him to obtain the restoration of his health, promising to employ it wholly in God's service. His doctor returning several days after to visit some other patient, chanced to meet Ramirez, and found him looking so strong, with so good a colour, and an eye so clear and bright, that he could not help exclaiming in amazement: "What do I see, this is indeed a stupendous miracle." "It is in truth," replied Ramirez, "a miracle of holy Master Avila's working, to whom I recommended myself. Know, that from the moment of my appealing to him, the fever left me and has never returned. Expectoration, cough, exhaustion, all have disappeared: in short, I am now quite well again." "Praise be to God," said the physician, "and to His faithful servant; for whose glory I am ready, if I should be asked, to depose upon oath that this is a real and striking miracle."

Not less so is the recovery of Don Martin Gomez, domiciliary of the principal church in Montilla, who had been tortured for several weeks by acute pains caused by a tumour which had formed in his body. Doctors and medicines had alike failed to cure him, the swelling grew worse, and already threatened gangrene. Hearing that the venerated body of the holy Master Avila, preserved in the church of the Jesuit Fathers,

was being transferred from the chest in which it lay to a more precious one of jaspar; he at once petitioned the Servant of God to pray for the recovery of his health, and, though with much difficulty, obtained as a great favour, a small piece of the habit belonging to the holy man. Touching the tumour with this he soon fell asleep, and waking up some hours later, he found, to his great surprise, that the tumour had disappeared, leaving no sign of its presence, in short, that he was completely cured.

Maria de Herrera, owner of a small garden, was most devout to Father Avila, whom she believed to be already in Heaven; finding herself burdened with debts in the year 1731, she had recourse to the Servant of God, hoping to obtain, through his intercession, some relief from her extreme poverty. Nor was she disappointed, for, having finished her prayer, and entered the garden, she found to her great wonder, that some French beans she had recently sown, had not only sprung up prematurely, but were ready for gathering, so that she was able to sell them and thus relieve her poverty. This help, however, was short-lived, as the supply of beans was soon exhausted. Not discouraged by this, but on the contrary filled with fresh confidence she applied again to her ready benefactor, saying: "My dear Saint, you are aware of my heavy debts, which I know not how to discharge; it is for you to see to this, for I have no one else but you." Thus saying, she returned to the garden, and found such a number of beans ready for cutting, that, being unable to contain her joy, she summoned the whole neighbourhood, crying out: "Behold the great miracle which Father Avila has performed." Every one wanted to procure some of these miraculous beans, and the woman sold them so profitably, that she was not only freed from her debts, but had also wherewith to live for a considerable length of time without further anxiety.

Josephine Castiglio was constantly tormented by violent pains in the stomach, which during the month of June, 1731, increased to such a degree, as to become unbearable; and she had to try to obtain relief by casting herself on the ground, and rolling about from side to side like one possessed. Some water having been given her to drink, mixed with dust from the room of the Servant of God, she quickly fell asleep, and when she woke she was found to be completely cured, after which the pains never returned to trouble her.

When a certain Juan de Prados, a mason, had gone down into a well to gauge the height of the water, a shower of stones, bricks, and lime, from the sides of the well suddenly fell in upon him, and any one would have thought that he must be crushed to death by so great a weight. In this danger he invoked Father Avila, who saved his life miraculously, for although he remained two hours buried under this mass of rubbish, he received no hurt.

It was a remarkable fact that a very fragrant odour pervaded the room which the blessed Master had inhabited, and remained very observable in it for more than forty years after his death. It seemed as though his loving Lord would thus embalm the memory of his bodily presence, and at the same time preserve the memory of the interior virtues of his soul, thus setting His seal to them, and showing how grateful they were in His sight, and how worthy of everlasting remembrance, and constant imitation by us.

May it please God, that He who gave this apostolical man, this great pattern and master of Christian perfection to His Church as a worthy instrument in promoting His glory upon earth, may equally render him, now that he has been raised to the honours of the altar, its powerful protector in Heaven. So may it be

MIRACLES

Examined by the Sacred Congregation of Rites and approved by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII. for the Beatification.

First Miracle.

Catalina Rodriguez del Rio, afflicted with a putrid tumour, was brought to the point of death by the severing of an artery, when, invoking the Blessed John of Avila, she was immediately cured.

Towards the middle of October, 1777, Catalina Rodriguez del Rio, wife of Antonio Nuñez de Arenas, a citizen of Almodovar del Campo, which was the birthplace of Blessed John, began to suffer from a violent pain in the loins, and beneath the ribs on the right side. External remedies having failed to afford any relief, after about a month's time, the surgeon, D. Isidore Carrero, was sent for, who at once perceived that within what seemed but a simple tumour, was concealed a large quantity of matter, which fluctuated under the pressure of the hand. He therefore judged it necessary to lance the tumour, but was opposed by others of his art who had been summoned in consultation, and whose advice it was decided to follow. The external remedies which they proposed proving useless, the internal malady gained ground so rapidly, that the slightest movement about the bed or in the room became intolerable to the sufferer. Towards the end of the year there were frequent spasms of increasing violence, until in the beginning of January, 1778, it was found absolutely necessary to open the tumour: and when this was done, sixteen pounds weight of purulent

matter was drawn from the wound. Matter, however, quickly formed again, and Dr. Carrero considered it necessary to perform a second operation, in order to give easier exit to the corrupt humours. When he informed Catalina's husband that this second operation would be attended with much more serious risk, as the tumour was so near the greater arteries, the latter sent for the celebrated surgeon, D. Sebastian Serrano, from the neighbouring Miguelturra, to perform it. This was done quickly and skilfully, and to all appearance very successfully, on the morning of the 20th of February, the patient remaining quiet and undisturbed during the whole of that day and the following night. But when towards dawn, wishing to call her husband, she made some slight movement, immediately an immense flow of blood burst from the wound, and could in nowise be checked by the bandages employed, as it soaked them all, and increased in quantity when these were changed. The two doctors being hastily summoned, perceived that the artery, of which the external membrane might have been injured during the operation, had given way through the sudden movement of the sick person, and was pouring forth blood continuously. Dismay at so unwonted an occurrence, prevented their attempting any of the expedients which science might have suggested, and the hemorrhage lasted the whole of that day and the day following until the evening, a space of nearly forty hours.

The lamentable consequences can easily be imagined: fainting, cold perspiration, syncope, suffocation, prostration, loss of sight and of pulse, a death-like pallor, and other tokens of the approaching end succeeded each other. The afflicted Catalina, having no longer any hope of life, prepared for the end, and received Extreme Unction. Towards eight o'clock in the evening the major-domo of D. Ferdinand Gijon Pacheco came to

visit her, bringing a picture of the Venerable John of Avila, and recommended her to implore his intercession. Catalina took the picture, applied it to the diseased side, and, as she afterwards deposed juridically, invoked with firm confidence the help of the Servant of God. She instantly felt her strength so far revive, that, contrary to the opinion of all the bystanders, she became convinced her cure was at hand. Shortly after the flow from the artery had ceased, for the bandages had become almost dry. Along with the hemorrhage all other dangerous symptoms vanished, and with renewed energy in mind and body, she was able, when left alone for a few moments, to move herself from the head to the foot of the bed, and to call the others with a loud voice to come and lighten the weight of wraps and bandages which oppressed her. Great was their astonishment when, on removing these, they found the artery perfectly sound again and a clean wound taking the place of the enormous purulent cavity and already in process of healing. All this had occurred, as the husband of Catalina testified, in less than an hour. From this time she experienced no difficulty in any of her movements: on the 25th or 26th, she arose and walked about the room; and, a few days after, she went, without any support, to thank her heavenly benefactor in the grotto, where he used to withdraw to practise his penances. The instantaneous and complete cure of Catalina was thus owing to the invocation of Blessed John of Avila, as was readily attested by Campobadol, one of the physicians, and by the surgeon, Carrero.

But the favours granted did not stop here. Catalina had been with child about a month, when the disease first manifested itself in October: and, after all that she had suffered during the four months which preceded her cure, there seemed little hope that she could give

birth to a living child. But it may not be too much to say that this life also was miraculously saved through the intercession of the Servant of God, for in due time Catalina brought forth a strong and healthy infant, who, out of gratitude to this heavenly benefactor, received the name of John, and was surnamed by the physician, the *child of miracle.*

Second and Third Miracles.

Francis Martin del Burgo, and Joseph Gomez, having been seriously injured in the face by an explosion, were saved from death through the intercession of Blessed John of Avila, and, in a very short time were, contrary to all expectation, entirely healed.

It had been already determined, in the year 1731, to transform into a chapel the room in which the Servant of God had been born, in Almodovar del Campo. A master stone-cutter of the name of Joseph Gomez was commissioned to provide the stones requisite for this purpose. Taking with him one Francis del Burgo, a labourer, he proceeded to a stone-quarry not far off in what was called the district *of the fountains;* and, having fixed on a large block of stone, they began to perforate it in order to form a cavity. This done, they placed in it half a pound of powder, and covered it with lime and earth, treading it firmly round an iron tube which was to guide the match. In drawing the piece of iron violently out, del Burgo may have struck some rock, and so produced a spark, which, communicating with the powder, caused a violent explosion right in the face of the unfortunate labourer and his master. Del Burgo was thrown a distance of fifteen paces, and Gomez of four or five paces, and both were dashed to the ground. They cried out with fright and invoked *Il Venerabile,* (as Avila was called in that country),

in whose honour and service they had undertaken the work. Dom Juan Gyon Romero, with two others, Bartolomeo Arcediano, and Ventura Carrasco, who were watching the work from a distance, ran up to their assistance and found them with their faces charred, and their eyes closed, as they thought for ever. Assisted by these, the two men were able to rise and return to the village, though meanwhile large blisters filled with blood and water had formed on their faces; in other respects, they were uninjured and without pain, except that Martin complained of a little in the ribs of his left side, owing probably to his fall. The first miracle then, performed in their behalf by the Servant of God as having been employed in his honour, was their preservation from the death inevitable from so terrible an explosion so close to them. From his past experience in his trade, Gomez knew this well, and he remembered having at one time seen in the neighbouring districts of Almaden, where there were mines of quicksilver, at least five persons killed by similar explosions, and as many rendered permanently blind. This last was what they both feared had now happened to themselves, for neither of them could open their eye-lids.

We must here divide our account into two narratives that we may give some particulars concerning each, leading to their both being unexpectedly and completely cured, as they and others testified in the process subsequently made.

When del Burgo found himself stretched upon the ground, he invoked the Blessed John, saying: "Holy Saint, have pity on me, for you know that I am burdened with a family;" and continued to call upon him unremittingly. He afterwards recollected that in that extremity, he had once invoked the Eternal Father, and once our Lady of Carmel. Having been conducted to his house, his wife, Isabella Cogolludo, beginning

in her distress to cleanse his face from the marks of the explosion, found that in addition, his right hand and the sleeve of his coat were singed. Francis would allow no remedy to be applied, but continued to invoke *Il Venerabile*, mildly complaining to him of the misfortune which had overtaken him in his service, and chiefly of his loss of sight, which he believed to be irreparable. Thus passed the painful and tedious hours from eleven o'clock in the morning of that day, until half past four the next morning; when, in order perhaps to afford him some slight relief, his wife led him out into a small courtyard adjoining the house. After he had seated himself, his wife being a short distance off, he exclaimed with tears, "Is it possible, my Saint, that I am not to regain my sight, seeing that I have laboured so zealously for your honour?" Suddenly, his eyes opened without effort, and the sight was found to be fully restored; nor was this all, the blisters and other injuries to the face and hands immediately vanished, leaving as little trace as if they had never existed, and the man was able at once to resume his work.

In the case of the stone-cutter, Gomez, the favour was not granted so immediately, perhaps because he had not placed the same full and absolute trust in the Saint as del Burgo, and had therefore sought other remedies. He was first led to the house of a relative, where his face was washed with rose-water, and then taken home, where he ordered his wife, Anna Lopez Izquierdo, to make a poultice of pure water and earth, taken from the room in which Father Avila had been born, with which to anoint his face, and principally his eyes, for he believed his sight to be for ever gone; he also promised that if cured he would prosecute without any payment the work on which he was engaged, and this he afterwards did. Besides this a physician had

been called in, and bled him once or twice, to counteract the effects of the shock. But, Joseph, continuing to implore the intercession of *Il Venerabile*, on the third day found himself completely cured, his sight being perfectly restored, and his face retaining no trace of its past injury.

To these facts, the two sufferers, their wives, and four other eye-witnesses, made their juridical deposition. Several skilful doctors and surgeons were likewise summoned to examine into all the circumstances, and pronounce an opinion. These unanimously decided that, while the perfect cure of both could not have been considered miraculous, if it had not happened so suddenly, yet it really was miraculous if we consider that the mischief done to them by the explosion of the powder might have been, and ought to have been, far more considerable than it actually was. But that they should have found themselves, on the second and on the third day, completely cured, surpassed, as all agreed, the powers of nature, or of science. As one of the experts remarked, some miracles are contrary to, others above, and others beyond nature, and to this last class must be assigned the sudden and complete cure of these two men, because in no wise could nature, or science, have accomplished it in so short a time.

DECREES.

DECRETUM PRIMUM.

DE VIRTUTIBUS HEROICIS VEN. SERVI DEI JOANNIS DE AVILA.

Cum in Congregatione Generali Sacrorum Rituum habita coram sanctissimo Domino Nostro Clemente XIII. die 30 Januarii, 1759, in Causa Toletana seu Corduben. Beatificationis et Canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Joannis de Avila Presbyteri Magistri nuncupati, propositum fuerit Dubium a Rmo. Domino Cardinali Portocarrero Ponente—*An constet de Virtutibus Theologalibus Fide, Spe et Charitate in Deum et proximum; nec non de Cardinalibus Prudentia, Justitia, Fortitudine et Temperantia, earumque adnexis in gradu heroico, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur;* Sanctitas Sua, auditis Rmorum. D.D. Cardinalium, nec non Consultorum suffragiis, nihil tum definire voluit, ut interim, tam suis quam aliorum precibus, in tam gravi negocio divino lumine mens ejus illustraretur. Hac vero die 8a Februarii post celebratum Missæ Sacrificium, vocatis coram se Rmis. DD. Cardinalibus Portocarrero Causæ Relatore, et Tamburino Sacrorum Rituum Congregationis Præfecto, nec non R.P. Benedicto Veterani Promotore Fidei, meque Secretario, statuit—*Ita constare de Virtutibus Ven. Servi Dei Joannis de Avila in gradu heroico, ut procedi possit ad ulteriora, nempe ad discussionem trium miraculorum.* Et ita decrevit, ac servari mandavit. Die 8 Februarii, 1759.

Ita reperitur in Actis et Regestis Secretariæ Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum. Ex eadem Secretaria die 11 Aprilis, 1864.

D. Bartolini.
S.R.C. Secretarius.

L. + S.

DECRETUM SECUNDUM.

DE TRIBUS MIRACULIS A DEO PATRATIS
AD INVOCATIONEM VEN. SERVI DEI JOANNIS DE AVILA.

VEN. JOANNES DE AVILA, sæculo XVI., præclaro Ecclesiæ et exemplo fuit et adiumento, propter laudem qua simul floruit sapientiæ ac sanctimoniæ. In eius enim moribus et documentis ea claruerunt, descripta a Iacobo Apostolo indicia sapientiæ *quæ desursum est;* cuius pretiosis fructibus christianus placet Deo, et hominibus probatur. Vere sapiens secundum Christum, *evangelizavit investigabiles divitias eius* tum verbo divino prædicando, tum animis in via spiritualis perfectionis consilio pariter scriptisque documentis, iuvandis, tum etiam suis ipse exemplis prælucendo. Hæc autem tanto fecit cum divinæ gloriæ incremento et animarum profectu, atque tantam inde sanctitatis et sapientiæ famam de se excitavit, ut viri insigniter sancti, qualis Joannes de Deo, Ignatius de Loyola, Franciscus Borgia, Petrus ab Alcantara, Teresia a Jesu, eius consiliis se regi voluerint, eique *Magistri* cognomentum adhæserit. Hæc eadem fama, qua clarus, septuagesimum annum agens, Montiliæ obiit anno XDLXIX., postea latius manavit prodigiis aucta, quibus Deus Servi sui sanctitatem firmasse ferebatur. Quare de ipsius Beatificationis Causa apud Sacram Rituum Congregationem agi cœptum est, eiusque virtutes heroicum attigisse gradum fel. rec. Clemens XIII. VI. idus Februarias anno MDCCLIX. declaravit. De miraculis deinde eius intercessioni tributis quinquies disceptatum est: primo penes cl. me. Cardinalem Aloisium Bilio Causæ Ponentem in antepræparatorio Cœtu III. idus Iulias anno MDCCCLXXV., deinde triplici præparatorio conventu in Ædibus Vaticanis, XV. calendas Apriles anno MDCCCLXXXIV. XIII. calendas Decembres anno MDCCCLXXXIX., et XV. calendas Septembres anno MDCCCXCI.,

demum X. calendas Decembres anno MDCCCXCII. coram Sanctissimo Domino Nostro Leone Papa XIII. in iisdem Vaticanis Ædibus, ubi Rmi. Cardinales et Patres Consultores huius Sacræ Congregationis, in generalibus comitiis coadunati, singuli suffragium tulerunt. Sanctissimus vero, omnium audita sententia, in re tanti momenti judicium suum proferre distulit, interea monens ut cælestis consilii lumen imploraretur.

Hodierna vero Dominica XXV. post Pentecosten, qua festum Patrocinii Beatæ Mariæ Virginis recolitur, incruento Missæ sacrificio oblato, in hac Vaticani aula pontificio solio assidens, ad se arcessiri iussit Rmos. Cardinales Caietanum Aloisi-Masella Sacræ Rituum Congregationi Præfectum, et Aloisum Serafini Episcopum Sabinen. Causæ Ponentem, una cum R.P. Augustino Caprara Sanctæ Fidei Promotore,meque infrascripto Secretario, iisque adstantibus solemni decreto sancivit:

Constare de tribus propositis miraculis, nempe de primo: Instantaneæ perfectæque sanationis Catharinæ Rodriguez Del Rio a phlegmonoso tumore, necnon, ob eius incisionem, a gravi læsione arteriæ in regione ileo lumbari dextera; de altero ac tertio: Præservationis ab obitu, atque instantaneæ perfectæque sanationis Francisci Martin del Burgo, et Iosephi Gomez a gravibus ustionibus e pulvere pyrico.

Atque hoc Decretum evulgari, et in Acta Sacrorum Rituum Congregationis referri mandavit pridie idus Novembres, anno MDCCCXCIII.

C. Card. Aloisi-Masella,
S.R.C. Præfectus.

L. + S.

Vincentius Nussi,
S.R.C. Secretarius.

CONFORMITY OF SPIRIT BETWEEN THE BLESSED JOHN OF AVILA AND ST. IGNATIUS.

✝
J.H.S.

And for my part, and that of the rest of the Society who are here, I can say that we shall ever maintain the close union of spirit and of desires which God has given us, for His divine service and praise. (Letter of St. Ignatius to B. John of Avila. *Cartas*, tom. v. Letter dcii.)

Those who have read attentively the letters of St. Ignatius to the Blessed Master and Apostle of Andalusia, John of Avila, may consider it needless to spend time in proving the similarity of spirit between them. This similarity is so evident, that scarcely a single writer has made a careful comparison between the characters of these two saints without pointing it out to his readers. Nevertheless, it seemed well to explain in what this conformity of spirit, which we find to have been so great, between St. Ignatius and the Blessed John of Avila consists, and to state the opinions of grave writers of the period, whose testimony we hold to be conclusive.

When we speak of the spirit of a particular saint and compare it with that of another, we are not alluding to the natural character or disposition of the man, nor to the fervour which characterizes his affections, words, or actions, nor to the supernatural intention and grace which animate and sanctify all that he does, although each of these may be signified by the word spirit. But we speak of that special characteristic which causes us to distinguish the sanctity of one holy man from the sanctity of another. Holiness, it is true, is one, since it consists in the conformity of the soul and all its operations with the will, the laws, the counsels, and the operations of God, so that one soul possesses greater

holiness in proportion as it imitates God's perfections more closely than another. Still, seeing that God is infinite, the soul of man, being finite, does not contain all His perfections, but some of these are more fully developed in one saint, and some in another. Grace does not destroy, but perfects nature, and even in supernatural operations habit counts for much. God is free and provident in the distribution of His graces, therefore there is diversity of operations, and consequently of the holiness which informs them. Experience confirms this, for every one perceives the great difference in spirit between a St. Jerome and a St. Francis of Sales, between a St. Teresa and a St. Bridget, and so as to other saints; yet we do not dare, on that account, to maintain that some of these are more holy than others.

The fundamental character of the holiness of the Blessed John of Avila did not differ from that of St. Ignatius, much less was there opposition between them; and this was the opinion of the older writers, founded principally upon the sentiments which these two holy men entertained towards each other.

The Licentiate Muñoz writes: "The glorious Patriarch, St. Ignatius, proved both by his words and deeds his high esteem for the Venerable Master Avila. *The spirit of these two holy men was the same;* they were one in intention and in ministry, and in the desire of founding a congregation of priests for the help of souls. Our Lord granted to St. Ignatius the execution of this object, to the Blessed Master John of Avila the intention which aimed at it; the latter had in view that Society of Jesus which the former did actually raise up, and sent his disciples to St. Ignatius to be received into it. As the authority and holiness of the Baptist gained credit for Christ, so did the holy Master Avila gain credit for the Society, promoting its introduction

and the foundation of its colleges, and favouring its members."

Father Orlandino, in book xiv. of his History, n. 59, after quoting the advice given by Master Avila to Father James de Guzman and Doctor Loarte, and similar counsels given by St. Ignatius to Father Olave, adds: *Ut intelligas, quam geminum illud evangelicæ sapientiæ lumen (Ignatius et Avila), consentirent.*"

Father Michael de Torres, Provincial of Andalusia, in a letter to St. Ignatius, giving an account of what he had perceived in the Blessed Avila, says: "The opinion which I had previously formed of Father Avila was confirmed when I became personally acquainted with him. It was to me a powerful argument for the sincerity and truthfulness of his spirit, to observe how heartily he embraced and received the spirit of the Society and all its intentions.

The complete conformity of spirit between Blessed John of Avila and the Society, and consequently between him and St. Ignatius, appears still more strikingly from the following remarkable events recorded by Jouvency: "Henry, Cardinal Archbishop of Evora, afterwards King of Portugal, had founded a famous Academy in Evora, which in time attained a high reputation, and sent forth brilliant doctors. At its commencement, the chief concern of the founder was to provide it with competent masters. He applied for these to St. Francis Borgia, at that time Commissary of the Society in Spain, who, on account of the infant Society being as yet unable to attend to all the places or supply the different offices which it was invited to fill, passed on the letters of the Cardinal to Blessed Avila, requesting him that if he had amongst his disciples any who were fitted by learning and virtue for the charge of teaching in Evora, and were suitable subjects for the Society, he would send them to him

immediately. The Blessed John, having treated with God of the matter, chose from his disciples two remarkable for piety and erudition, Ferdinand Perez and Peter Paul Ferrer, both Spaniards. Having summoned them, he told them that he felt moved by God to recommend them to the Society, in imitation of the Baptist, who sent his disciples from his own school to the superior school of Christ; and that the life which they had led with him was but a shadow of that other more perfect discipleship. He added: "Father Francis asks me for two theologians, who possess faculties for teaching, and the degrees and titles which the Universities grant, that they may proceed to the recent foundation in Evora and become professors there." "I think," he said, "that with God's grace, you can fill this post. Go, therefore, whither the glory of God calls you, and, following my advice, give your names to the Society; which is the school of Christ. To it I send you, and I trust that you will some day prove yourselves to be worthy disciples of so great a master." Obeying the voice of Blessed Avila, as though it came from God, both left their relations, and abandoning considerable worldly possessions, together with the expectation of earthly honour, they presented themselves before St. Francis, who received them affectionately and admitted them into the Society. It required no long time to form them to the Institute, so well prepared had they come from the hands of Father Avila, and even in the novitiate showed themselves well practised in virtue. Within a comparatively short time the Commissary sent them to Evora, Perez being appointed Professor of Theology and Ferrer of Holy Scripture. While both adorned the University with their brilliant learning, Perez in particular speedily drew scholars to it from the whole of Portugal, to the great satisfaction of its illustrious founder, who thanked Father Francis for

sending him such teachers, and spoke of them in terms of the highest praise.[1]

Father Bartholomew Alcazar, in the *Chrono-historia de la Provincia de Toledo*, devotes a long paragraph to the death and eulogy of the Blessed Master John of Avila, and to the high appreciation of his eminent holiness by the Society of Jesus. He commences thus: "It would be a culpable omission to pass over in silence the precious death of the Blessed Master John of Avila, which occurred in Montilla, on the 10th of May, in this year. We mention him here, not merely by way of a short, passing eulogy, but in order to express the lasting gratitude felt towards him by our least Society, especially in this Province of Toledo, which he enriched by sending to it some of his best disciples, as well as others who have swelled the numbers filling our houses and colleges, as we have already seen."[2] After the narrative of his life he continues: "He was one in desires, as in spirit and zeal, with our holy Father St. Ignatius; for his high ambition was to found a Congregation of Priests for the conversion of souls.

It has been stated, that the usual matter for the Blessed John of Avila's sermons was drawn from the more terrible truths of religion, and that he and his disciples had thus acquired certain habits of austerity little tempered with the spirit of compassion. Even if this be true as to the subjects of his sermons, he was still in perfect accord with the spirit of St. Ignatius. The Blessed John and his disciples devoted themselves chiefly to giving missions in country towns and villages, and such missions have the special design of leading a rough and illiterate people to attain peace of mind in some degree, by giving them the Spiritual Exercises. With such persons St. Ignatius directs that the subject

[1] Jouvency, *Hist. Soc.* p. v. l. xxiv. § xvii.
[2] Alcazar, *Chrono-hist.* Dec. iii. año ix. c. i. § 4.

of election should not be entered upon nor the other Exercises continued beyond those of the First Week, and these contain, as is well known, the more severe truths of Christian life. Did the constant preaching of these truths produce in the Blessed John and his disciples any undue austerity? On this head the Venerable Luis of Granada, the intimate friend and beloved disciple of Master Avila, writes as follows in his Life of him: "It is difficult to say whether he won most souls to Christ by his teaching or by the greatness of his charity and love in his exercise of good works towards all. He loved them, and accommodated himself to their needs, as if he were the father of all, making himself, as the Apostle says, all things to all men, that he might save all."

Father Luis of Granada aimed in this biography at benefiting those who are devoted to the office of preaching, assuring them in his Preface that "in this evangelical preacher will be distinctly seen, as in a bright mirror, the characteristics and qualities which this office requires." We know that Father Granada attained his end in this as in his other writings, but it is at the same time interesting to observe that the similarity between Father Granada's description of Blessed Avila, and what we know of St. Ignatius, is so marked, that by merely changing the name, we might apply to the latter whatever has been said of the former, and that occasionally, when describing the sentiments of Blessed Avila, the author employs words which seem to have been quoted from the text of St. Ignatius' writings. For example, in § vii., where he treats of the virtue of penitence and sorrow for sin, "Another efficacious method of attaining contrition Blessed Avila used to recommend to his correspondents, bidding them ask of God the favour that He would disclose to them the demerits of their

conduct, and cause them to understand what their past life had been in relation with God, and what God had been in regard to them, showing them what blessings they had received from God since their birth, and how badly they had corresponded to them. 'When this thought comes only from the human spirit in man it produces a feeling of sadness, but when it proceeds from the Spirit of God, it becomes so clear and makes him so conscious of his great unworthiness, that it strikes him as a miracle how the earth can endure him, and it fills him with wonder and enables him to believe all that faith teaches him. He is animated with so great an anger against himself for having lived as he has done, that were it not for the fear of offending God, he would lay violent hands upon himself, and wish all creatures to revenge the insult offered to the Creator. That which a man feels when God discloses to him the poor opinion he ought to have of his actions is beyond description, for it comes from a higher spirit than that of man.'" Now, these expressions are almost word for word the same as some that are contained in the first and second Exercises of the First Week.

The maxim which Blessed Avila followed, and which he inculcated upon all his disciples, is stated in the celebrated letter that he wrote to a preacher, and is usually placed at the beginning of the *Audi Filia.* In it he gives this counsel: "For the office to which your Reverence has been called, you should take heed that the childlike spirit towards God, our common Father, be not quenched within you, nor the fatherly spirit towards those whom God has given you as your children." Father Granada also relates that Master Avila, having been asked by an earnest-minded theologian what he should do in order to obtain fruit by his preaching, replied: "You must love our Lord intensely."

The Blessed Sacrament of the Altar was the subject which Master Avila chose most frequently for his discourses; therefore he is usually represented as kneeling in adoration before this Divine Mystery. Luis of Granada says that "he preached daily during the Octave of Corpus Christi, and when in Granada every Thursday, . . . often exhorting to frequent Communion, a practice nearly unknown at that period. He had to endure much persecution and contradiction, both from prelates and others, on this account. . . . He also recommended his disciples to urge the same in their sermons." For the space of forty-six years he dwelt on the sublime mystery of the Holy Eucharist, his words pouring forth like fiery darts from his burning heart, and enkindling love in the hearts of all who heard him.

His zeal was equally active in imparting to all the knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, His Life, Passion, and Death, and he did this so fervently and habitually, that upon the day of his funeral, the holy and learned Father Francis Arias placed amidst the inscriptions which adorned the church of our College of Montilla, a tablet with merely the following words, embodying an ancient saying: *Quidquid conabar dicere, Christus erat.*

If the most terrible truths of religion had furnished the ordinary subject of Master Avila's preaching, a like spirit of dread would have pervaded the tone of his writings, but, on the contrary, in every case, they breathe throughout a spirit of sweetness and gentleness, and his argument is ever drawn from the most consoling truths of our holy faith. The very titles of his treatises make this evident. He wrote one on Divine Love, five on the Holy Spirit, twenty-seven on the Blessed Sacrament, ten on the Blessed Virgin, one on St. Joseph, and one on the *Audi Filia*, besides his

letters. In the *Audi Filia*, he sometimes propounds the eternal truths with such moderation and benignity as to feel obliged to excuse himself on that very account to the reader, as he states in the Preface: "It seems well to inform you that as this book was written to a pious virgin, and as she and those of her condition require rather to be fortified by motives for confidence than terrified by excess of rigour, it has the former purpose more in view than the latter." As to the matter contained in the letters, Father Luis of Granada says: "I do not believe that a single one will be found wherein the principal considerations are not founded on this exalted theme (the love of Christ our Lord)." [1]

[1] Translated and abridged from the *Cartas de San Ignacio*, tom. v. App. p. 441.

ADVICE GIVEN BY THE BLESSED MASTER JOHN OF AVILA TO FATHER JAMES DE GUZMAN AND TO DOCTOR LOARTE, WHEN THEY WERE ABOUT TO ENTER THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

✝
J.H.S.

1. Avoid seeking to promote your own ends by any particular line of action, nor take any account of souls, except in order to do them good, and ask help for this from our Lord. Do not make choice for yourselves of any particular means of benefiting them; you should, on the contrary, resist this thought like any other temptation.

2. In nowise imagine that you enter the Society of Jesus with the view of pronouncing judgment on what others do, but take to heart that saying of a Religious: *Ego judicavi veni et non judicare.* Beware of this danger, especially if you think that you are men of some knowledge, for in this matter it is easy to err, and so run the risk even of the loss of God's grace. Believe that God guides those who govern in the Society, and that they are actuated by some motive which you are not aware of, or that they have some special intention in view. Take not upon yourselves the responsibility of judging others—*Quid ad te, tu me sequere;* for if you do you will bring upon yourselves much trouble and anxiety.

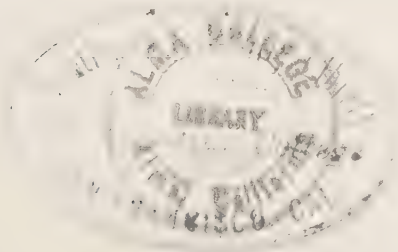
3. Root yourselves firmly in obedience, esteeming its practice to be a signal favour granted by God to you on earth, and wait for Him to indicate to you His will through your Superiors, not founding this expectation on the wisdom of the Superior, but on God's promise, who bestows His help on him who humbles himself. If you thus set a true value on obedience you will enjoy great peace of mind and profit to your soul.

4. You should understand that although you may not feel you possess the liberty which you think needful for the direct winning of souls, and are engaged in different matters leading to other immediate ends than the conversion of souls, you ought not to be disturbed thereat; for, since upon the preservation and extension of this Society great good to souls depends, whatever may be ordained for the promotion of this end, if it be even scrubbing dishes, helps towards the conversion of souls, and should be performed with great content, consecrating your lives to the attainment of the end in view, in all that is commanded you. You should, therefore, turn your thoughts away from other occupations and apply yourselves to what is ordered, not so much for what it is in itself as because it is committed to your care, holding it to be a favour from Christ that you are members of this holy body, in which God is served so faithfully.

5. Be prepared for the cross, and have it ever before your mind in your labours; giving no occasion to others to complain; bear patiently what is done to you, without any complaint as to the diversity of grades which must exist in communities, remembering that however much you are tried by your neighbour, this is very little in comparison with the favours you have received from God. Direct your efforts chiefly to the avoidance of all irritation against others and to the endurance of insults, gladly allowing yourselves to be trampled upon like clay, after the example of Christ; and see that you pay much attention to this, for should you be careless in regard of it a fall is inevitable, seeing that this warfare is continuous. Look to yourselves, and endeavour not to gain the mastery over others, nor enter much into argument with them, unless it be your duty to do so; remember the words I have already quoted: *non judicare veni sed judicari.*

6. Labour in the work of your own progress with that diligence which is due to the affairs of God, bearing in mind that you have been admitted to the heavenly vision of God as He hung upon the tree of the Cross and that you are standing on holy grouud, that should raise you above all passing affections. Strengthen yourselves much in Christ, and in the power of His might, that you may deny yourselves, not only in matters of sense, but more in your will, and most of all in your understanding, for this is the canker-worm, the enemy of your true peace, condemning like a presumptuous ring-leader the acts of Superiors, fomenting division, and opposed to the spirit of obedience, in short, an idol set up in place of the Holy One of God. Again and again I recommend you, and entreat you by the tender mercies of Christ, to humble your understanding, that God may reign in you by faith, being confident that what your Superiors command is God's will. Take this, and nothing but this, for your consolation in every case, and for comfort in all your doubts; as long as you follow these principles all will go well with you.[1]

[1] *Cartas de San Ignacio*, tom. v. App. p. 458.



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